

CLAYPITS EXPANSION ON DARTMOOR PROTEST DAY SEP 19TH 1999

The ramblers nationwide had organised a day of action in respect of the governments freedom to roam legislation. We in Devon were meeting to support that and to also protest against the proposed expansion of the clay mining in the Lee Moor area of the Dartmoor National Park.

The leaflet from the Devon Group of the Ramblers Association who had organised the event, clearly indicated the aim of the rally :-

The aim of the rally is to highlight concern over the outstanding mineral planning permissions, which are currently under review.

If ECCI and Watts Blake Bearne are free to take up their options huge tracts of South West Dartmoor could be either excavated for china clay deposits or become dumping grounds for spoil. Although landscaping may, in the long term, go some way to concealing the devastation, what of the years when work will be in progress?

Cadover Bridge and the Blackabrook Valley are amongst the nearest areas of wild open moorland for the people of Plymouth to enjoy. Shaugh Moor is rich in archaeological remains. Bridleways and footpaths would be affected as well as access to the higher moor. All irreplaceable.

Crownhill Down is an expanse of relatively low-lying moor and heath with wide views over Plymouth Sound. It is already blighted by workings on either side of the north/south bridleway. There is a proposal to link these areas with a works road right across the Down!

We were joined in the protest by groups from the Council for the Protection of Rural England, the Dartmoor Preservation Association and those who live in the local area in villages such as Shaugh Prior. Such was the significance of the day, we were joined by the National Chairman of the Ramblers Association, David Grosz, who travelled down from Scotland specially for the event.



The weather forecast for the day was heavy showers and strong wind, that did not deter the large group who had driven to Cadover from all over the West Country and beyond.

We all met at 10.00 AM on Sunday 20th Sep 99 at Cadover Bridge where we filled the main Cadover Car Park. We then all moved across to the North Side of Cadover Bridge for a series of short addresses from

Joan Long, Chairman of Devon Ramblers
Alison Watt, Local Chairman of CPRE
Pat Hewerson from the local area
David Grosz, the RA national chairman



All echoed the same sentiments that it would be unacceptable environmental erosion of the local area and that we must do all that we can to lobby our politicians to stop the further development of the clay open cast mining in the Dartmoor National for a variety of sound reasons. Pat Hewerson gave a particularly rousing oration on the local impact to the 500 or so people from the diverse range of groups at the rally.

David Grosz further stressed the importance of lobbying our elected MPs to make our views known and encouraged us to write to all who could influence the decision. He pointed to the fact that all age ranges were here today from 4 to 84 yrs of age and that the impact of the development would, if allowed to go ahead, be felt for generations to come.



The presentations over, we split into 5 different groups to take part in walks of varying lengths around the current pit developments. There was even a horse ride trek organised for the many who had brought their horses to the rally.



We joined walks organised by Don Millman and Helen Rowett, two well known and very active members of the Plymouth group of the Ramblers Association. The two walks, which attracted 80

Soon we were passing the first of the spoil heaps, tipped only a few hundred yards from the road. If the development takes place then these spoil tips will be much closer to the road and to the nearby village of Shaw Prior.



people were combined for the first four miles, before splitting. We opted for the slightly longer 6 to 7 mile walk around the clay pit workings and skirting some of the proposed new development areas.

We duly set off by crossing Cadover Bridge and skirting the northern edge of the workings keeping quite close to the road which links to Cadover Bridge to the main road a couple of miles or so south of the bridge.

We reached our first stop for our morning coffee break at Hawks Tor with splendid views across to the Sound and the Plym Valley. There were several old stone circles in the vicinity which would be buried forever if the clay companies are allowed to exercise their option to develop.

Our route now swung North East along a bridle route and much closer to the clay works.



The bridleway brought us very close to a working clay pit and the lunar snowscape below clearly shows the environmental impact of these open cast workings.



It is salutary to note that this is but one of a number of such holes in the ground and that for every unit of clay produced, some five units of waste must be dumped in heaps. This was one of the smaller ones.

All 80 stayed together until we reached the road from Blackaton Cross back to Cadover Bridge. At this point those who had opted for the shorter walk left us to make their own way back down the road to the car park below.

The walks leaders pointed to the area below us, that of Blackabrook valley which would become a massive open cast pit if the development was allowed to progress.

The rest of us made our way north across the head of the valley towards the Tor on the skyline.

We crossed Black Brook in the valley and further up the valley could see a series of red posts with blue balloons on them, along the side of a leat at one point which carried water to one of the mines. Perhaps these marked the boundary of the proposed development, we weren't sure, balloons, someone has a perverse sense of humour.



Leaving the brook, we made our way up, in the now warm sunshine, to Great Trowlesworthy Tor where we met one of the other walking groups for a few minutes. They had just finished their break and we were just on time for our lunch stop.

There were majestic views of the moors rising up to North Hessary Tor miles to the North and back to the sea and Plymouth Sound in the South.

As a sailor I frequently see the scars on the landscape caused by these workings from the Sound.

Following our lunch stop we made our way down past Little Trowlesworthy Warren and evidence on granite carving. There was a large granite plinth which was carved out to be taken to Plymouth only to be found too heavy to move across the moor at the time.



It was all downhill from here. We passed by some excellent dry stone wall corrals, old commercial rabbit warrens, past Trowlesworthy Warren House where pony trekking is so popular and down to the River Plym below in the valley.

We had a very short stop at the junction of the river Plym and Blacka Brook, a popular spot for visitors.

We continued along the southerly edge of the river for a further half mile along relatively flat easy walking.



We crossed the road by the local beauty spot of Cadover Bridge and to the car park full of ramblers cars. As can be seen Cadover, only 10 miles from Plymouth is a local beauty spot and remains so, despite the Lee Moor mine workers so clearly visible from the bridge.

Despite the forecast of strong winds and heavy rain showers for the day, we had enjoyed light winds and plenty of sunshine for the whole of the walk. It is amazing just how the weather can be so different to the predictions.

The large numbers who had met for this access rally had just the right weather for the walks with the dry conditions and a temperature just right for walking.

Many of us finished with the customary ice cream at the car park before passing our thanks to all those stewards and organisers who had made the day such a success.