

FERNWORTHY RESERVOIR TO CRANMERE POOL

START POINT : FERNWORTHY RESERVOIR MAIN CP GRID REF: 669838

Cranmere Pool remains a mecca for Dartmoor walkers with a history of visits from walkers stretching back for almost two hundred years when guides led the gentry into the depths of the moor to this famed pool.

Long ago a letterbox was set up, the first on Dartmoor to my knowledge, for the walkers in all their Victorian clothes to leave their calling cards. I imagine Cranmere Pool was then a full pool; often these days it is almost devoid of water although the famous letterbox remains there, much improved no doubt since the box of the early days.

Why does it remain so popular? Possibly because of its relative inaccessibility, up on the high northern moors surrounded by bogs acting as the sump area for a variety of rivers such as the Dart running south and the Okement and the Taw running north.

Typically the approach to Cranmere pool is from the north, often starting at Belstone, or by the less adventurous from a military OP about a mile to the north where cars can be parked. We wanted to approach it from the south. The route out from Postbridge is approaching 16 miles over some quite difficult terrain, possible. We thought that perhaps an approach from Fernworthy Reservoir might allow us a slightly shorter route and the second attempt at a recce on 22nd September 02 gave us the ideal day to test the 'shorter' route.



The route we took is shown on outline map given above, You are reminded that this should be used in conjunction with a 1:25000 OS map of the area such as the OS leisure map no 28 of Dartmoor.



John T had done his homework for the route and although we were approaching it from the South it would be better to skirt round to the north of Cranmere Pool and approach it from the Okement Court route.

This of course would add miles to the route and we estimated that starting from the main car park at Fernworthy Reservoir the route would be of the order of 13 to 14 miles.

Still that was less than the 16 mile route from Postbridge.

The day of the recce was a lovely day, sunny but not too hot, ideal for walking the route. On the recce we had a keen group of six walkers.

We set off at just gone 10 AM and made our way to the easterly end of the reservoir, only about a quarter of a mile from the car park and to the majestic dam.



It had been dry during August and September and in consequence the reservoir was low, certainly not tumbling over the top of the dam, as it does every winter.

We made our way down the zig zag path to the bottom of the dam and over the bridge at the bottom with lovely views up the stream to the dam itself.



This is an even more impressive sight when the waters are tumbling down over the dam.

We zig zagged up the well defined path to the top of the dam on the other side and then out towards the open moor.

We headed out alongside a fence and then through a gate and onto the open moor.

Above us, about a half a mile away we could see Thornworthy Tor and John led the group up to that Tor.

I maintained a lower route and contoured round the Tor in a clockwise direction and then we met up again as we headed west towards a boggy area and then out through a gate through a dry stone wall and onto the moorland.



Off to the left we could see the conifers of the large area of Fernworthy Forest. We headed north west over Shovel Down picking minor paths to follow, usually sheep or cattle tracks.

We continued on and up over Stonetor Hill where there was a dry stone wall heading north west which we followed, with it on our left hand side for the next mile or more.



The route led us over some rough scree and granite boulders as we dropped down towards a brook, a tributary of the North Teign river.

This brook was easy to cross and we continued up over another hill.

Looking at the picture of the brook the 'high tide' line is visible.

It shows the waters in this brook can get a good deal higher than when we made our way over it.

Across the next valley and high above us we could see a fine looking Tor, Watern Tor by name and this was the next Tor we would walk to.

Before that however we had to find a way across the North Teign River.

Over the top of the hill we went following the dry stone wall as we had been doing since reaching Stonetor Hill and on down again towards the North Teign.

We found there was a relatively easy way across this river, via boulders and a rail, easy to cross when the river is low but a different proposition after lots of rain I imagine.



We crossed it without mishap and gathered in this nice spot for morning coffee.

Since this was a recce then next decision was the route to take to get up to Watern Tor.



I led three of the group up a route keeping the dry stone wall to our left. There were problems initially since it was very boggy going, even in the dry spell we were having.

We managed to avoid disappearing into the bog and continued to follow the wall first north west for a few hundred yards and then due west and straight

up to the top.

This was the steepest climb of the day, from a contour line on the map of 400 metres to a contour line of 530 metres at the top, approaching a 400 to 500 ft height gain.

We made it up the hill to the top corner of the dry stone wall and then followed an easy path north west up to the impressive Watern Tor.

The two Johns tried a drier route up the side of a brook, High Lake on the map and then north west across Hew Down to the corner of the dry stone wall, over a stile and on up to Watern Tor.



Our route was shorter but rather boggy and we agreed that the Hew Down Route was the better route even though it was marginally longer.

Watern Tor is very impressive indeed, it was the first time I'd visited it and I was pleased that I had. It is quite a spread out Tor with some excellent granite outcrops.



Having stopped to admire the Tor and the views from it, we headed due west along an easy path down to

cross Watern Combe, over a stream and then up again climbing easily up to intersect the path leading to Hangingstone Hill.

On such a clear day, there were no problems with navigation and we found a nice clapper bridge just before the path leading up to Hangingstone Hill and we stopped at this point for lunch.

With normal rainfall you might expect to find water under the clapper, not in this dry September though.

John wanted to try the easy, but 1 mile longer route from Ockerton Court leading to Cranmere Pool, rather than approach it direct from the lunch break point just below Hangingstone Hill



To reach the approach point at Ockerton Court, we initially followed the track we were on north down and away from Hangingstone Hill until we came to another track heading west and descending down in a curved approach to a ford.

Over the ford we turned more south westerly and followed the well defined track upwards until the point where the track swung round by 90 degrees to head north west.



We continued on the same line we were on, i.e more SW and headed up across moorland to higher ground where we passed pools on our left hand side.

Shortly after the pools, we were at the oddly named Ockerton Court and we turned due south to pick up a faint track that was to be our direct and "easy" access

across the bogs to Cranmere pool a little under a kilometre to the south of us.

The path wasn't exactly a motorway but once we found the narrow track, it wasn't too difficult to follow, as we made our way in towards Cranmere.

Eventually we could see a depression in the ground, but no water in it after this long dry spell.

The real indication that we were at Cranmere Pool was the view of a couple of ramblers, bending over a small plinth which housed the famous letter box with a book for walkers, writing their comments in to show they had reached this elusive spot.



We admired the scenery for a few minutes, whilst some of our group duly signed in and got their letter box stamp and then we were off once more.

Conditions were still favorable for walking, a breeze to cool us and late summer sunshine.



Off to the east on a high point we could see the small MOD building which characterizes Hangingstone Hill, a little under a mile away.

But, even after the dry spell there were still bogs to negotiate, and certainly no clear path to follow.

It was just a case of picking your way through the peat bogs, with care, for the first 500 metres until we crossed the head of the steep gully falling away to our north that is the head of the Taw.

It is shown as Taw Head on the 1:25000 map, for those of you trying to follow this route on a decent map!!

We then had a relatively easy and dry ascent up to Hangingstone Hill.



As you can see in the picture, there is an military observation building at the top and a flag pole.



I've huddled behind the stone building more than once trying to avoid the worst of the weather, eating lunch.

A couple of minutes there and then we were off again heading due south for the next kilometre across to Whitehorse Hill.

What we didn't realise was that there were a lot of peat bogs between us and the top of the hill, OK to walk across in dry conditions but in wet weather I can imagine it would have been very difficult indeed.

Thinking about it retrospectively, it wasn't that easy even in the dry weather.

John later worked out an easier traverse across by not going to Whitehorse Hill but continuing on to find a path that led to the far end of the peat pass.

Just to the left of the stones marking the apex of Whitehorse Hill there is a Philpotts Peat Pass, one of several he constructed a hundred years ago.

We followed the Peat Pass east for the a couple of hundred metres or so until we reached the far end.



It was still in surprisingly good condition with the granite paving stones clearly visible to give a safe crossing through the bog.



At the far end of the Peat Pass there was another sign describing why Philpotts constructed these peat passes.

Soon, we were off heading towards Manga Hill and Fernworthy Forest beyond it about 2 miles away on a bearing of approximately 120 degrees.

In the good visibility of the day we could see plenty of cattle and sheep tracks through the tussocks and the going was relatively easy and we made good progress.

After 30 minutes or so we could see Teignhead Farm just across a scar in the landscape, due to mining, through which Manga Brook now flows.

We kept to the left of Manga Brook and descended down to the major clapper bridge over the North Teign River.



Just at the top of the hill from the ford was the huge expanse of Fernworthy Forest.



We followed a path on a bearing of roughly 135 degrees up the hill to a gate entrance to the Forest.

Once through the gate and into the forest we were on the final section of the recce, the walk along Forest Paths and roads through the forest back to the car park.

Nevertheless, we still had approaching 3 miles to go, it is a big forest.

We followed the a rough track east up over a hill and then descended down again until eventually we passed a stone circle in a clearing in the forest.

From there, down, along the wide track until we reached a gate with a road heading off to the right and a footpath in the other direction to the left.

At this point there is a clearing and a small car park, useful to know of, if you want to avoid the final section and thereby reduce the walk by a couple of miles at least.



We chose to follow the road which meandered its way around the southern most extremities of the reservoir and then north east again.

Finishing a long recce with a 1 mile road walk definitely not my idea of fun, even though the final few hundred yards was via a footpath north of the road running nearer the reservoir.



Finally we made it back into a field with picnic tables and chairs just below the main car park.

I made a mental note that it would have been perhaps quicker and a good deal easier to follow the footpath around the northern side of the reservoir from where we met the road, just beyond the gate and simply follow the path below the eastern end of the reservoir and the dam we had passed at the start of the walk.

By the time we got back it was approaching 5 PM and we had been out walking for 7 hours.

Although the original plan was for an 11 mile walk to Cranmere the recce route had been more like 14 miles.

How to reduce the walk to the advertised length was immediately obvious? I remembered the parking area at the far end of the road we had walked along. If we started from there and not the main car park we would cut off getting on for 2 miles or more miles counting the out and back sections and we would end up with our 11 miles.

Johns recce had been done in beautiful weather. The planned walk was on 13th Oct 02 and that day was one of heavy continuous rain, fog and strong winds, a real 'sod' of a day. Did John lead the walk? Those who know John wouldn't have asked the question.

Of course he did, and he started from the main CP and did the full 14 miles.

11 intrepid souls turned up on the atrocious day, including two who had travelled up from Redruth and two more who had come down from Gloucester specially to tackle the walk.

John gave them full value for money on the day and although 5 of us chose a cut down version of the walk because of the conditions, the visitors from far afield were given the full monty walk by John, and I imagine they will remember the day for a long, long time.