

GUTTER TOR CP TO VISIT MINE WORKINGS IN THE AREA START POINT GRID REF 578674 DISTANCE 9.5 M

Gutter Tor Car Park is at the end of a narrow country lane and it has recently been enlarged, a wise move since it is becoming a very popular area to visit. On the Whit Bank Holiday weekend of 2005 on Sunday 29th May to be precise, 25 ramblers gathered together at the car park, in lovely walking conditions, to walk through and by several old mine workings in the area and also to visit many points of interest en route.

At the start of the walk which was led by me, Dave Pawley, I outlined the route and pointed out many of the points of interest we would visit. Although some of the points were "old hat" to some, there were plenty of places that were new to many of the group, including such points as Philpott's Cave, Grants Pot, Broad Rock and Grim's Grave.



An outline of the route we took is given above. It should, as usual, be followed in conjunction with a 1:25000 map of Dartmoor.

Leaving the car park, we made our way to just beyond the Scout Hut camping area, crossed over a leat and then swung due north and made our way across some easy level walking in the general direction of Down Tor.



Before long we swung east with the Deancombe Valley below us and off to our left.

Soon we approached our first tin mining area, the Upper Deancombe Valley open cast mining area, where a huge amount of land had been mined to a depth of 40 feet in places.

We walked through the mine workings, heading north east and then swung more east to continue our climb up to the next major mining area of Eylesbarrow mine which is at a local high point.

As we climbed, we passed PCCW boundary stones and then the first of the many ruined buildings of this once very large tin mine.

As we made our way uphill we passed what could have been mistaken for a small double stone row.



Closer inspection revealed that these pairs of stones were once part of the mine infrastructure and supported connecting rods that carried mechanical power up to the higher level pumps used in the mines themselves.

At the top, by some of the larger ruins, we stopped for our morning break, quite welcome too, as we had been walking mainly uphill for approaching an hour.

After the break, we made our way to a track junction and then swung off to the right to head across towards Plym Ford along a particularly rough and stony track.



We passed by more mine workings in a small hollow, almost certainly part of the Eylesbarrow complex.

The area is close to Evil Coombe and therefore it might conceivably have carried that name.

Some distance beyond the mine workings, we left the track and headed across and down to Plym Ford to join the Abbot's Way track.

On the way towards the river we were passed by some mountain bikers.

I have my doubts whether it is legal for them to cycle across this part of Dartmoor since the National Park authorities are becoming increasingly concerned as to the erosion of the tracks the treads of the bicycles will cause.

I think they should be even more concerned about trial bikes using the area, which no doubt will happen, if it isn't already happening.

Ahead of us lay our first major river crossing. We were within a kilometre of the head of the River Plym. Nevertheless the brook can be very full and difficult to cross, albeit so close to its head. Luckily it wasn't in spate and stones were visible at the ford which made our crossing relatively straightforward.



Once across, we made our way along the Abbot's Way but only for a very short distance before we were off on another uphill section.



I chose to leave the easy Abbot's Way since I wanted to take the group to visit Duckspool.

In order to take the shortest route, I headed straight uphill for about 800 m heading South East towards a small pile of stones at the top of the hill.

At the top of the hill is Great Gnat's Head, a long name for what is no more than a small conical pile of stones which were obviously put there by man, probably to ease navigation in the area

The views south west down the Plym Valley from Great Gnat's Head were wonderful on such a nice early Summer day.

We had reached the end of the major uphill section of the route. We had been walking mainly uphill for approaching 5 km. Duckspool is almost due east of Great Gnat's Head and less than 1 km away, albeit 1 km across slightly boggy ground and the group were warned to watch where they walked.

We were soon walking around the large bowl that is now Duckspool. It really was once a pool but the pool was long since drained by miners in their quest for precious metal.

It is quite a remote spot on this featureless area of the southern moor and easy enough to miss.

Its popularity with walkers is enhanced by the fact that it is also the home for Crossing's Memorial Stone and letter box.



The new letterbox was only put in place under the memorial in 2002 and is a large stainless steel box containing a variety of letterbox related objects. Many visitors to the spot write their names in the visitors book.

Several of our group who were visiting the spot for the first time took the opportunity of keeping up the tradition and recording their visit.

Following a 5 minute break at the memorial, we headed off to the Duckspool surface mining area and made our way right through the workings passing by areas of tin streaming and old miners shelters, now just ruins.



We soon swung SE to follow the course of Black Lane Brook which flows down to join the River Erme. The area near the bottom is known as Wollake.

At a point opposite my chosen lunch break point was a group of stones on the other side of the brook.

The group of stones included one huge flat rock and underneath the flat rock was the little known Philpott's Cave. It was named after Eden Philpott's who had been instrumental in creating this moor man's shelter in this remote spot just before the first world war.

Not only had he had stone walls built and lined with turves he had also had ensured that food and drink was available there to sustain the workers who sought shelter there.

After a visit to this spot, unnamed on OS maps incidentally, we returned to the west side of Wollake to enjoy our own sustenance in the sun.

Following our lunch break, we walked down a narrow track following the line of Wollake and soon found another little known cave, known as Grant's Pot and once again not marked on the OS map.

Three or maybe four of our adventurous ladies took turns in a little caving to see how big the cave really was.



Anyone visiting it is advised to bring a torch with them.

Six years ago there was a letterbox inside, the box seems not to have stood the test of time since none of the ladies who ventured inside could find any sign of one.

Philpott's Cave and Grant's Pot represent the easterly end of the walk and what goes up must also go down. It follows that the return to the car park would be rather more downhill.



We made our way across towards Erme Pits but not down into this area of mine workings.

Since we had one slight uphill section to get up to Broad Rock we held the contours, keeping slightly to the North of Erme Pits and then Erme Head.

It was slightly boggy going but nothing of any consequence and after a short uphill section along part of the Abbot's Way we reached to relatively inconspicuous Broad Rock. This piece of granite has both the name of the rock and BB engraved on it. BB stands for the Blatchford Manor boundary.

Surprisingly Broad Rock is shown on the OS map.

From Broad Rock I wanted to get across to Langcombe Brook to visit Grim's Grave.

Although it is relatively level going, it was just a tad on the tussocky side.

Although only small tussocks, they were enough to slow progress down a little but it was only for about a kilometre SW from Broad Rock to the kistvaen with unusual retaining circle with the stones leaning out, rather like the petals of a flower opening.

It is a particularly well preserved kistvaen and well worth a visit.



From the kistvaen, we followed the Langcombe Brook down the slightly descending valley along easy to follow tracks.

We walked by yet another mining area, this one called Deadman's Bottom mine gert, how many is that we had walked through or by so

far on this walk??

We forded a small brook flowing down through Deadman's Bottom and then continued down along the old narrow track to pass by yet more mine workings near the foot of Langcombe Brook just before it flows into the Plym.

The Plym is rather wider at this crossing point and although Plym Steps is in fact a ford, it can result in wet feet. I decided that this was a nice point for an afternoon coffee break. Some decided to ford the river first and take a break on the other side.

One walker took an early bath in the crossing which convinced the majority to make their way slightly upstream to cross over via large stones and keep their feet dry and their pride intact!

Once we were all together again, we made our way initially down along the north side of the Plym before diverging more north to walk by the largest of all the Menhirs on Dartmoor. It is known as the Drizzlecombe menhir, tall it most certainly is at 14 feet.

From there I led the group due west across Drizzlecombe and over a slight ridge where there is a bronze age enclosure and good views of Gutter Tor and of our car park just down beyond the Scout Hut and surrounding copse.



We didn't venture into the enclosure to examine the bronze age artifacts but continued north west keeping above the Scout Hut copse to cross the leat and to return the couple of hundred metres down to the cars.

I've never seen so many cars in the car park so it is easy to see why Dartmoor National Park have expanded this car parking area.

We had been out on the moor for over 5 hours by the time we got back, we had walked getting on for 9.5 miles in all. It had been a good day for walking and although we had climbed about 1000 feet in height, it had been relatively easy going, although there had been seven brook or river crossings and a few boggy areas and the odd tussock to navigate.

So how many mine workings had we visited, a quick check shows we had visited seven of those too. Two centuries ago the area was very different to what we find today, hundreds of men out on the moor working the mines in all conditions.

How times have changed..... now a National park and a magnificent walking area enjoyed by thousands.