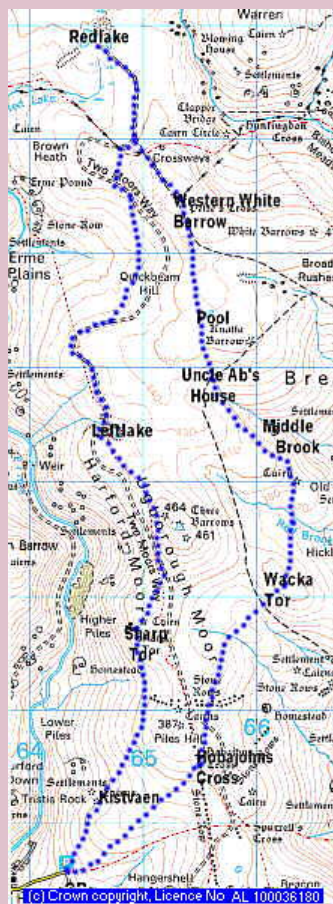


WACKA TOR, UNCLE ABS HOUSE AND REDLAKE START POINT: HARFORD MOOR GATE CAR PARK GRID REF : 643 596

This 11 to 12 mile moorland walk was led by Mike Heyward on 4th Aug 02 and it attracted 15 ramblers. Concurrently a 7 mile variant of the walk going as far north as Left Lake was offered by Helen Rowett, this option was taken by 14 ramblers. Only the longer walk is described here.

For once Dartmoor was benign with hardly any wind and long sunny spells and temperatures in the 20's in the morning, although slightly less in the afternoon when dark clouds appeared ominously overhead.



On outline map of the route which we followed is given above. This is illustrative only and readers are advised to cross refer this map together with the write up to a 1:25000 map of Dartmoor such as the Ordnance Survey Leisure Map 28. It is worth noting that Wacka Tor and Uncle Ab's House do not appear on this map and grid references for both are given at appropriate points in the walk description.



The walk started at Harford Moor Gate CP at 10 AM, we reached the most northerly point, Redlake at 12.45 for lunch and we were back at the CP by 3.40 PM after a couple more stops than normal for water intake because of the warm conditions.

Leaving the car park, our first target of the day was a climb of 100 metres height gain up to Hobajohn's Cross on a bearing of 050 degrees, a distance of just under 1 mile from the car park.

Although not particularly steep it did serve to warm us up thoroughly on a day with temperatures in the low 20 degrees C.

From Hobajohn's Cross our route was 015 degrees as we climbed a little further and then levelled off as we made it across East and West Glazebrooks just below Glazebrook Head.



This entailed two minor brook crossings which we negotiated without difficulty.



Once across we headed up to Wacka Tor (grid ref 664 620), perhaps the steepest climb of the day, but only for a relatively short distance. Once at the top of the Tor we regained our breath with a well earned morning coffee break.

There are superb views from Wacka Tor, down towards Shipley Bridge and we could easily pick out many points on the moor which we have visited in the last year or two.

The next point to aim for was Uncle Ab's House and although it could be just about seen about 1.5 miles NNW you are certainly not advised to head for it directly.

To do so would take you perilously close to Red Brook Mires and this boggy area is very dangerous.

The best way of proceeding is to head almost due north and descend from Wacka Tor to find a suitable crossing point across Red Brook well below the mire; there are plenty of crossing points, it is just a case of finding a suitable one.

Once safely across Red Brook, head north up hill to a point overlooking Middle Brook Valley with its steeply descending sides.



Contour around the westerly side of the valley. The mine workings shown on the OS map as Petre's Pits Bottom can be clearly seen below you, off to the right.



This valley leads down to another valley, Bala Brook, which takes you well down towards Shipley Bridge and Zeal Hill area.

Continue to contour the valley until you are beyond most of the mine workings and then make your way down and across the now gently sloping valley and find one of several crossing points across the brook.

From here it is but a short climb up the east side of the valley to Uncle Ab's House (656 639).

The house is now a complete ruin but 150 yrs ago, Uncle Ab lived in the house and the stables provided a horse power change point for the animals which pulled the wagons up from the Zeal Tor area, about 2 miles down the valley.



For us, it provided a nice little water intake point and it is always worth reflecting on the ruins around us now compared with the hive of mining activity which it must have been all those years ago.

Having rewatered we were soon on our way north towards Western White Barrow and Petre's Cross, just under a mile further north.



The going here was becoming quite tussocky and hard going but just a hundred yards to our left was a path of sorts which linked 3 Barrows and Western White Barrow.

As we made our way along the track we came across a pool shown on the map, with Eastern White Barrow on the skyline behind it.

It was warm here alright and there was an unusual sight of a herd of cattle taking the plunge or at least standing in the pool cooling off.

This path is marked by stone markers and the going proved much easier along this track than across the tussocks.

The going got even easier when we came upon the course of the old Zeal Tor Tramway and we made fast progress to Western White Barrow and Petre's Cross, actually on the Barrow.

We gathered here before the final 1.25 miles of the morning NNW to Redlake and our lunch break.





Returning to the Zeal Tor tramway we followed the track north.

Just a hundred feet or so off to the left of the track there was evidence of the settlement constructions reminding us that not only metals but clay also was mined in this area.

It is worth noting that the area leading to Redlake can be very boggy and certainly wet, even in midsummer and the best approach is via the tramway tracks in the area.

We continued down along the Zeal Tor track until we reached a point on the map called Crossways where the Zeal track meets the much better known Redlake tramway and also where the 2 Moors Way path leaves the Tramway to ahead across to skirt the south side of Huntingdon Warren .

Follow the Redlake tramway for the final dog leg to the distinctive pyramidal spoil heap of Redlake and the long flooded clay pit of Redlake.

By the large lake is a nice place for a stop and it was our lunch break point.

We fed the flies various tit bits from the exposed parts of our bodies as we ate.



As I and a few others subsequently found out, horse fly bites can set up a reaction leading swollen ankles, legs and knees. I now very much regret not wearing long trousers on the day. I guess it had to happen eventually, I'd been tangoed by a b.... horse fly or two.



Compared with the other lakes we met on this walk this was the largest by a wide margin. I wonder whether it is now stocked with fish or whether the mining has left it contaminated too badly for fish to survive.

After the lunchbreak, we commenced our return back to the car park.

It is possible to get all the way to within a mile of the car park by simply following the Redlake Tramway as it follows the contours and descends generally south to between Ivybridge and Bittaford.

Besides being incredibly boring, it would have also been very hard on the feet as well as on my knees! We thought it best to escape from the tramway whenever we could and to leave that route to the cyclists who use it a great deal.

We followed the tramway back to Crossways and just past the junction we ventured off the track to head due south across tussocky moorland thereby avoiding the large dog leg of the tramway.



After only 400 yds we were back on the tramway again but only for a short distance before we again left the track to continue due south across even more tussocky moorland.

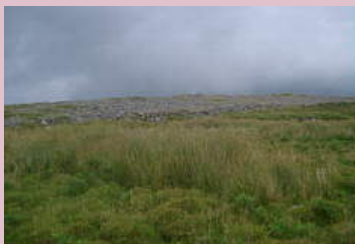
Although this section was hard going for just under a mile it did serve its purpose in keeping us off the tramway.

After a couple of tussock induced falls and some difficult little valleys to negotiate a few of the group welcomed the return to the tramway again for its solid footing again after the tussock hopping we had encountered.

Although we could have taken another short cut across yet more tussocky moorland, almost all the group elected to follow the leader along the tramway as it curved around and on south to the Leftlake pool and tramway bridge.



Another 5 minute stop here atop the bridge, with the ominous dark clouds gathering overhead, and we were on again leaving Leftlake and following a well defined path away from the tramway and uphill towards Three Barrows.



The path took us just west of the Barrows and the group elected not to climb up the final section to the top of Three Barrows but to head south and to descend to the Tramway for the final two or three hundreds yards plod along the track.

Above us we could see the edge of the scree at the side of the three prominent barrows that we missed by staying low.

Off to the right again and we continued due south across easy moorland going up to the cairn just east of Sharp Tor.

From here there are great views south right down to Plymouth and on the day Plymouth Sound was easily picked out.



We skirted east of Sharp Tor and commenced our final leg, the 1.5 miles generally south back to the car park.

We avoided the descent right down to Piles Corner and maintained height as far as we could, as the moorland became much easier going as we picked up a track and headed on a bearing of approximately 200 degrees back towards Harford Moor Gate.



About 2/3 of the way back from Sharp Tor, just off to our right, there was an excellent example of a kistvaen and a member of our group was only too willing to demonstrate how a body could have been placed here in its bronze age grave.

Not far to go now and 10 minutes later we could see the car park and we arrived back at about 3.40 PM.

The walk had been exactly as described by Mike on the walks list, of the order of 11 miles and not really steep climbs but quite tussocky in places. I had visited places I hadn't been before, namely Wacka Tor and Uncle Ab's House and it was a lovely way to spend a summers day, in the warm sun for a change. Thanks Mike for getting it very right on the day.....

We had managed to avoid the rain and soon we were on our way down towards Harford Church in our cars for the 2 mile run down the very narrow country lane to the outskirts of Ivybridge and so to the A38 for the 10 mile drive back to Plymouth.

All we now had to do, at least a few of us, was to suffer the reaction to the bites from the myriad of flies which had visited us during the day!!!!