

GRIMSPOUND, HEATHERCOMBE AND RETURN VIA HOOKNEY TOR
START POINT: KINGS OVEN CAR PARK NR WARREN HOUSE INN, GRID
REF: 675811



The figure of 8 walk out of Kings Oven Car Park was led by John Roberts on 5th September 01, who wisecracked his way round the 10 mile route, entertaining all around him.

The walk attracted 24 ramblers and the Kings Oven Car Park was quite full, such that the nearby Bennets Cross Car Park a short distance up the hill was used by two or three of the group. John was ably supported on the walk by his mentor and supervisor young Norman C.



The figure of 8 route we took is shown above, it was similar in many respects to a route described that we did in the mid winter of 99 when it was freezing.

That walk is described and is linked to via the Dartmoor Walk "Challacombe and Heathercombe from Bennet's Cross".

To best follow the route the outline above should be related to a suitable ordnance survey map of the area and I recommend using the Dartmoor Leisure Map no 28, available from most good outdoor leisure outlets.

At 10 AM on the dot John outlined the route he hoped to take if he didn't get lost and we were soon on our way heading east along a track which led us through some magnificent heather covered moorland.

In September the moor is a mass of purple heather, the sight and the scent of it is quite a spectacle in its own right.



The first mile or so of the route took us east bisecting the route from Bennet's Cross down to Soussons Wood and then north east up and below Headland Warren and down the other side close to Headland Warren Farm.



This walk is a figure of 8 one and as can be seen from the map above Headland Warren Farm is the pivot point for the two loops making up the figure of 8.

On the way back we would be heading down the valley to the right hand side of the farm.

From just above the farm we climbed up a steep track the quarter of a mile north east to a small road heading

north south.

We followed the unfenced road south for less than half a mile until we were due west of Grimspound.

The track up to Grimspound, one of the biggest of such pounds on Dartmoor, is easy to follow and because of the popularity of the location the track has been given a foundation of large stepping stones as it approaches the pound.



It is well worth crossing over the containing wall and visiting some of the old hut foundations within the pound.

Several are very well preserved indeed and the entrance to the pound at the highest point on the southern side is well preserved.

Leaving Grimspound we followed the track east before swinging more south up a small track to visit a memorial stone.

As we found out it was erected by the Aircrew Asociation to commemorate the death of 4 airmen who crashed on the spot during the second world war.

The plaque shown in the picture on the right outlines the reason for the memorial.

Leaving the memorial we made our way downhill south east along a clear path to Heathercombe Woods.

After a break for coffee we climbed the stile into Heathercombe Woods and followed the path north through the woods to emerge into a grassy area and immediately beyond to the very small hamlet of Heathercombe.





To our left there was a reclaimed area of woodland just to the west of the hamlet.

The owner informed us that this was going to be planted in the near future as a mixed fruit orchard. It will be interesting to see just how it develops.

We continued along north through the woods again following a well marked footpath and after about a half a mile we emerged over a stile into field systems.

The path then continued north across more stiles and over a small country lane and eventually north west up a track enclosed within hedges towards the farm at Lower Hookney.

Before reaching the farmhouse the right of way diverted up some wooden steps into a field where the track ran parallel to but above the farm.



Beyond the farm the footpath headed west across to West Coombe where there is another farm.



Just before the farm the path went through a small copse and crossed a stream.

As we reached West Coombe the steepest section of the walk commenced. We had been warned there was to be one steep climb, well over a mile long it took us up south west, approaching 700 ft increase in height from the farm in the valley to Hookney Tor way above us on the high moors.

The climb started off following a ridged road up a very steep climb up from the farm. I can see why the track was ridged, traction would prove very difficult otherwise in wet conditions.

Off to our left we could first hear and then see a small waterfall tucked away in the trees, I should imagine it would be rather more impressive after heavy rains than it was after a dry spell.

The farm lane turned off to the right and we moved from tarmac to a narrow footpath that continued to climb up towards the moors.

Off to the south east we could see King Tor a half a mile away and just off the footpath there appeared to be a small man made reservoir.



About half way up the hill John suggested we stopped for lunch, it had been a hard climb and there was still a fair way to go, albeit less steep than the first section of the climb.



After lunch we continued on up until we emerged through a gate in a dry stone wall. We followed the line of the wall and not too far above us we could see the local high point of Hookney Tor.

Adaptable as ever John agreed to divert from his planned route and visit the Tor. It was well worth the visit as the views from the Tor were magnificent.

Lovely views all round and to the south east we could see the clear outline of Grimspound with Hemeldown Tor behind it.

John who was getting carried away with visiting the Tor stood on a local lump of the Tor and offered to lead us to any of the other Tors we may wish to visit. He turned down my requests for visits to King, Hookney and Birch Tor for some strange reason.



Leaving the vantage point of Hookney Tor, we descended north west down along a narrow track to the road below, and from the road down to the footpath that would take us through Headland Warren Farm and on down south along the valley to Challacombe.

As we approached the farm we saw a green sign diverting us away from the farm. In fact it was a local request and not an official one as there was no red sign saying the bridlepath was closed ahead. However we effected a compromise by making our way along the outskirts of the farm to pick up the bridlepath once again just below the sign.

There has been a certain amount of rancour in the past in this area and the diversion suggested would have taken us about a mile out of our way. Our diversion took us one hundred yards. Luckily we have not come across many such attempted local diversions since the foot and mouth restrictions were relaxed in July.

Having regained the bridleway just below the farm we followed it south down through the valley with Hameldown Tor to the East and another unnamed hill off to the west.



We soon approached and passed alongside Challacombe Cottages and farm and then our route swung from south west to north west as we headed up north west with Soussons Woods off to our left.

We were approaching an area of intense mining activity a hundred years ago and Golden Dagger Mine was ahead of us soon after we had crossed a stile onto

a track leading up the valley.

We had an afternoon coffee break by the mine and as we made our way through the long derelict buildings many stopped to read the plaques describing the history of the mine.

Our path continued uphill along a stony track, even in the dry spell a section of the the track was very wet and the pools of water showed clear evidence of the mine contamination of the water which is still there, getting on for a hundred years after many of the mines had ceased to function.



We approached another mining area, this one called Vitifer and we swung left and made our way left up a narrow steep stony track which soon merged with a wider track which we had taken when we left the car park at 10.00 AM.



In the distance we could see the Warren House Inn, now beginning to be shrouded in the fog which was beginning to envelop the area. Looking back the Tors and hills behind us had disappeared in the fog.

We were soon back at the car park thanking John Roberts and of course his controller Norman for a most enjoyable 10 mile walk.

Next time he assured us he would visit all of the Tors in the area and not just the one we had visited by special request.

All that was left was the half an hour drive back to Plymouth or to Exeter, Honiton and many other Devon towns the two dozen walkers had come from.