

TORS AROUND THE WEST OKEMENT VALLEY (12 MILES)

START POINT : DARTMOOR INN MOOR GATE CP, LYDFORD GR 524854

The walk on 1st August 2001 was planned and offered by Paul Williams, ably assisted by Betty. It was a 12 mile circular walk going up to near Meldon Reservoir, then following the West Okement River upstream to West of Great Kneeset and then returning via Amicombe Hill to the Great Links Tor and descending back to the car park via Widgery Cross on Brat Tor.

The weather was forecast to be relatively good with plenty of sunshine but when the 24 walkers arrived at the car park up the lane, east of Dartmoor Inn, Lydford, the high moors could be seen shrouded in mist, or was it low cloud with a base of 1500 ft.



The actual route we took is shown in outline form on the map above. This outline should of course be cross referred to a 1:25000 ordnance survey map of Dartmoor such as the ordnance survey no 28 leisure map in order to properly follow the route.



We left the car park at 10 AM and headed up the lane for about 500 metres towards a ford over the stream.

There were stepping stones and a bridge, most of us took the stepping stone route.

We were following a clearly defined track up to this point and we continued to do so for the early part of the walk.

Once across the stream we swung north west and headed up gaining height gradually as we made our way along to the east of a ridge leading up to Great Nodden, high above us.

The easy to follow path continued, all was to change after lunch however !!!



There was plenty of evidence of mining in the area and we continued north west climbing up and between the mining areas.



In the distance we saw a small bridge, obviously once carrying some form of tramway. We made our way up and over the bridge and walked along the track, still climbing slowly.

Apparently this tramway rose up to Bleak House to the East of Grt Links Tor, we would be visiting both in the course of the walk but not by following the track all the

way!!!

About a half a mile further on along the tramway track, we came to a point where the track stopped and headed off south east up and to the east of Great Links Tor.

The picture to the right shows the change of direction of the track quite clearly .

Once there must have been some points here to enable the carriages to change direction so abruptly, that or a turntable device for reversing the direction for the trams on it.

Leaving the track we continued still generally north west and the fog/low cloud began to spoil the views somewhat.



Across the valley we could see Sourton Tors but we gradually swung more easterly and made our way around the imposing Branscombe's Loaf, poetic licence as it would have been imposing had we been actually able to see it.



Due north of us we could see Meldon Reservoir about a mile away.

We made our way holding the contours around a huge bowl and across to Shelstone Tor, where we stopped for morning coffee.

There would normally have been excellent views from this Tor of Black Tor across the valley and the highest Tors on Dartmoor to the north and north east.

Once again the low cloud put paid to these views.

After the morning break we descended very steeply down NE to the valley below through which flowed the West Okement River.

We made our way down very carefully down this steep slope to a weir with a bridge to make the crossing of this fast flowing river very easy.



Once across the river we turned south east and began to regain the height we had lost in the descent from Shelstone Tor by starting our walk up the West Okement Valley



The steep sided valley through which we walked was very luxuriant at this point with many different species of trees.

After a half mile of uphill along the valley we entered one of the oldest woods on Dartmoor, now a nature reserve. The long narrow wood is named Black-a-tor Copse and it stretches for over a half a mile along the valley.

There were plenty of boulders to negotiate in this section and also some minor bogs to test the boots. Leaving the copse behind us we continued our steady walk up the valley for a further half a mile towards Lints Tor.

Picking our way across a couple of streams we were faced with our first more strenuous ascent up to Lints Tor at just under 500 metres and into the clouds surrounding it.



At the pace we were making we were there quite quickly and we found shelter from the wind and the damp as best we could as we stopped for lunch.

After the break, we headed due south descending slowly across tussocky and often quite wet ground near to a point shown on the map as Kneeset Foot.



Although we couldn't see it, through the fog, the high Tor of Great Kneeset was only a half a mile to the SSE of us.

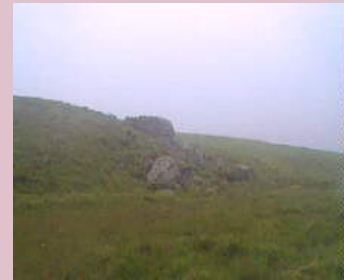
We crossed a stream or two and continued generally southerly to a flat area at the top of the valley, just to the West of Great Kneeset, squelching our way along through a marshy area.

I wonder how damp this area would be after heavy rainfall, we were here in mid summer after a heat wave and it was still quite wet.

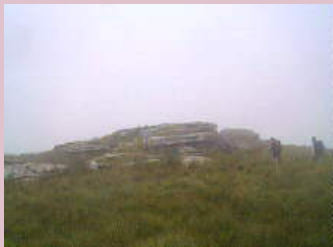
Had the weather been kinder to us we would have been able to look down the valley south towards Amicombe Brook down towards Tavy Cleave.

However it wasn't and we couldn't.

By the high point of the valley near to a rock outcrop on the east side, we turned west, made our way across a boggy area and then started the most arduous section of the walk, the climb up Amicombe Hill and its long and tussocky grass and very uneven ground towards Green Tor just under a mile to the west.



It was the hardest mile of the day and felt like three, one of the problems of walking in cloud is that you don't know how much further you have to go and if the going is hard, as it was, it seems to go on and on.



Eventually we could see Green Tor looming up ahead at just under 550 metres in height.

We gathered at the Tor and regrouped after the efforts of the day and the walk was taking its toll, one way or the other.

Just down in the valley below us was Bleak House, very aptly named, now a ruin but some of the walls were still standing.

Bleak was a very apt description of the location, particularly on such a foggy day.

It was also the point, mentioned earlier, that the tramway led to, that we had left hours ago on our way round to view the Meldon Reservoir.



A quick look at Bleak House and the clouds were beginning to lift a little and we could see two Tors up above us those of Higher Dunna Goat and Lower Dunna Goat.



We made our way up to the higher one and took a well earned break for an afternoon fluid intake.

After the break we continued across WNW towards the highest Tor of the walk, that of Great Links Tor at just under 590 metres.

We were soon there and blue sky lay ahead and there were some brilliant views looking down to the farmland below.

Great Links Tor is very impressive with its large granite outcrops and is a very significant point to see from the Lydford area below.



The rest of the walk was in bright sunshine.



We left the clouds behind us and descended down for just under a mile south west to Widgery Cross at the top of Brat Tor.

After another stop to admire the cross and to look at the cars in our car park way below us, we were on our way again for the final steep descent to the farms below and back to the car park.

Having negotiated the descent down a nice short cropped grass track, we crossed the brook we had crossed at the start of the walk via stepping stones and followed the track back down for the final few hundred yards to the car park.

There were several DEFRA Red "No Access" notices around, a reminder of just how badly this area had suffered due to F&M disease.



The real evidence was almost the complete absence of stock on the walk, no sheep wandering round the moor and neither were there any cattle. Normally we would have expected to see both in abundance.

We were back in the car park by just gone 3.30 some of us feeling quite tired after the efforts of the day, particularly the section from Lints Tor to Green Tor with its difficult terrain.

Paul had Betty had done well in shepherding us round the moorland above us and getting us back relatively all in one piece and thanks was given were it was most deservedly due.

For me the walk had introduced me to an area of Dartmoor new to me and I was pleased to have done it. What a pity about the fog and cloud though, it spoilt what would have normally have been some superb views of the high Tors of norther Dartmoor.

Looking on the bright side though, at least the fog and breeze kept the flies away !!

Doubtless we will repeat this walk at some stage. I hope the weather will be rather kinder to us next time and let us see some of the views this walk would have normally have given us.