

MINIONS CARADON HILL TREMAR AND SIBLEYBACK LOOP START POINT: MINIONS (WEST END) CAR PARK GRID REF 260711:

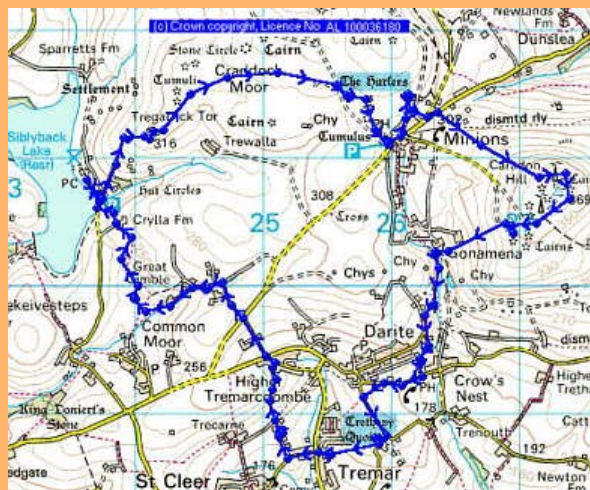
Minions and the Caradon area in the Parish of St Cleer up on Bodmin Moor in Cornwall is excellent walking country with plenty of industrial archaeology all around the area.

Bodmin Moor is very different in terrain to Dartmoor and is very much smaller at only 10 miles by 10 miles.

Even though we've walked the area around Minions many times over the years there is always somewhere you haven't been before or haven't seen and so it was with the walk of 8.5 miles led by Dave Tromans on Sunday 19th October 03.

It was a cool day but not a wet one. At the start of the walk located in the highest village in Cornwall at just under 1000 ft the temperature was just 9 degrees C and in the fresh Northerly wind the wind chill made it feel even colder.

The temperature and the cool conditions didn't deter the group and the walk attracted over 30 of the group to the start point.



An outline of the route we took out from Minions on this 8.5 mile walk is shown above. It was particularly attractive to me because it showed we would be walking to the top of Caradon Hill and from there down the valley through to Crows Nest and beyond. In order to properly appreciate the route we took this outline should be related to a 1:25000 ordnance survey map of the area such as the OS leisure map of Bodmin Moor.



After the usual Ramblers related announcements we were off on our way, walking along the road through the village passing the Cheesewring Hotel on our right and then making our way up a rough lane by the village toilets heading towards the Minions Heritage centre located in one of the many many old mine buildings scattered round the area.

The heritage centre has quite a few exhibits in it and set the scene well for what we would be seeing on the day.

Leaving the heritage centre we retraced our steps for a few metres and then we swung left and made our way across to the junction of two country roads heading east out of the village. We walked along the right hand narrow road for a couple of hundred metres, maybe less and when we came to the remains of what was once a railway bridge over the road, we scramble left up the bank to the path of the railway and started the major climb of the day, heading south east up towards the top of Caradon Hill.



This was to be my first ever visit to the top of Caradon Hill and I was looking forward to it for two reasons, firstly to see just what was up there and secondly that the climb would certainly warm us up. The ascent wasn't difficult but it was a steady uphill climb.



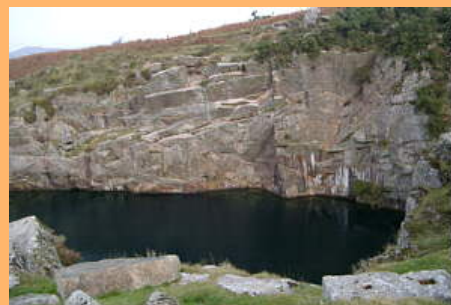
As we climbed the view behind us right across Bodmin Moor was quite spectacular and across the valley atop a large quarry the magnificent Cheesewring granite rock formation was clearly visible as were Tors around the area.

We climbed up over a distance of just over 3/4 of a mile and by the time we had reached the top we had gained 230 feet in height. Whereas Minions is at just under 1000 feet the TV transmitting station is at just over 1200 feet.

At the top there are three masts, the very tall TV transmitting mast and two other smaller masts and a number of low flat buildings and a scattering of microwave parabolic aerials aimed up to quasi stationary satellites, no doubt.

We waited for a few minutes for everyone to reach the top and then made our way clockwise around the buildings at the top of the hill and then commenced our descent down the other side heading south west.

After about 200 to 300 metres we came across a disused granite quarry with spoil heap and the quarry itself, small compared with many we have seen on Dartmoor but very pleasing to the eye with the customary large pool within the quarry.



We made our way around from the top of the quarry overlooking the pool, around the granite waste and then back around and into the quarry itself, very nicely sheltered from the wind which was blowing well at the top of Caradon Hill.



Once we had looked at the workings we continued downhill down towards the valley which had been such a vibrant and busy copper mining area 150 years ago. We descended down to an area marked on the map as Gonamema.

Just below some houses overlooking the valley we stopped for morning coffee, a nicely sheltered spot.

I tried to visualise just how busy this area had been employing over 3000 men, women and children in its heyday as the largest copper mine in Britain and possibly in the whole of Europe.

Much has been written about the history of the South Caradon Copper mines and there is an excellent web site devoted to the history of the mine, produced by the Manley family. For those who would like to delve into the industrial archaeology of the area click on the link to the site to be found from the Bodmin Moor page you visited on this site. It is well worth a read, so much information there.



After morning coffee we made our way over a stone stile and onto the footpath leading down through the valley right down to an oddly named small hamlet called "Crows Nest". It does have a pub there of that name, perhaps the hamlet was named after the pub.



The right of way down through the valley offered spectacular views of range of old copper mines in the area, there were getting on for 10 mine chimneys and masses of old spoil heaps on either side of this amazing valley, again it was the first time I'd actually walked down through the valley to the Crows Nest.

Leaving the open spaces the footpath led us down through a wooded area heading due south with the village of Darite just off to our right as we made our way down, although if I hadn't checked with the map I'd have never seen the village from the footpath.

Eventually we ended up on the road with Crows Nest pub about 100m down the hill.

We turned right and headed west up the hill for about 300 metres before we came to a footpath over as stile and across fields.

We crossed the stile over the hedge and then followed the general line of the footpath across fields south west for about 200 m before coming out onto another country road.

Once on the road we turned left and headed south east up a slight hill for about 400 metres.



At one point we stopped and looked back and across to see the village of Darite, which we had passed when walking down the valley to Crows Nest without noticing the village.

It is quite a large village and I understand it and Minions came into being as villages

where the miners who worked the South Caradon Mine could live.

There are several such villages in the vicinity which sprang up around the copper mine.

Soon we had reached another hamlet but one that was also the home of one of Cornwall's ancient monuments. It is called Trethevy Quoit and it is now a number of huge granite slabs, some standing vertically and one acting as the lid.



The information boards indicate it is an early bronze age burial chamber and was once covered in earth and small granite stones.

What is left now is very spectacular and quite a tourist attraction in its own right.



After a look at the monument we continued on along another footpath west across more fields and and through a copse of sorts until we emerged out onto a road and by another small village, this one called Tremar with its scattering of houses.

The signpost indicated that we were very close to St Cleer, after which the parish is named. We headed up the road towards St Cleer, but only for a short distance.

After about 200 metres along the road we turned right and followed another right of way now heading north.

It led us initially along a narrow track and then out through fields. After a nice little uphill section we stopped in a field with good views across to St Cleer and other villages in the area, this was our lunch break point.



30 minutes later we were on our way again passing through a gate and then along a narrow path with hedges on either side and some brambles too. Before long we were leaving the footpath and turning left up through yet another hamlet that I'd never been to before.



This hamlet is called Higher Tremarcombe.

There were some nicely renovated houses in the hamlet and one row of cottages with the strange name of Plym Cottages, quite a way from the Plym though.

Just by the cottages we were at a cross roads.

The route took us straight across, still heading roughly north and uphill along a narrower country lane for about 400 metres.

We came to one of the major country roads in the area which led right back to Minions. Our walk was to lead us quite a way on yet before returning to Minions.

We crossed the road and headed through a gate with the name of Little Barton on it, which I take to be the name of one of the farms we walked by shortly afterwards. We walked up the track and along a farm lane by a farm or two and along a narrow section of off road footpath.



Off to our right was a place called Little Gimble, we turned left and made our way down south west along a track leading to a spot called Great Gimble.

Beyond Great Gimble we were on footpaths through fields and through a usually very wet, marshy and muddy area.



Not on this walk though, the ground was bone dry after the driest Summer and Autumn in many years and there was scant evidence of the marshy land normally there.

We crossed a footbridge over a stream and then swung north across usually marshy land but again quite dry through fields and

on up across fields and over stiles up towards Crylla Farm which looks down onto Sibleyback Reservoir.

The water level in this reservoir, beauty spot and wind surfing mecca was well down on what one would normally expect it to be and the fringes showed how high the reservoir would normally be.

Beyond Crylla Farm we crossed another stile or two and then we descended steeply down across a field and onto the road running along the southerly edge of the reservoir.

We turned right onto the road and walked along to the entrance to the popular tourist area on the eastern edge of the reservoir.



As we did so we passed very close to the edge of the reservoir and could see just how low the water level really was after this amazingly dry three months or more in 2003.

There are some nicely manicured grassy areas with seats, a restaurant, childrens play area, toilets and all you would associate with a

tourist area and windsurfing spot.

We stopped by the side of the reservoir to enjoy the facilities and to have a tea break and perhaps even feed the ducks which swarmed around us. It was quite balmy down by the lake and many degrees warmer in the sheltered area by the lakeside than it had been a few hours ago in the car park up at Minions on the moor above.

All we now had to do was to get back to Minions by making our way up to and across Craddock Moor. Certainly there would be a climb up to get to the moor again and with it a drop in temperature once we got into the wind again.

After the short break to enjoy Sibleyback we retraced our steps back to the road, across the cattle grid and then turned left onto the road for a few metres before turning left onto a very rough track leading up to the moors.

The stunted trees at the start of the track had a strange growth hanging down from them which I haven't seen a lot of in the UK, it looked quite similar to the Spanish Moss which I'd seen on thousands of trees in the USA though.



The track leading up to Craddock Moor isn't a public right of way, neither is it officially a permissive path.



We have it on good authority though that the local farmer has no objection to walkers using it, providing they are careful about closing gates properly as they make their way up towards Treggarick Tor and Craddock Moor beyond.

The steep path took us up through a wooded track and then out into open fields through gates and then out onto the moor above.

We made our way right up to Tregarrick Tor and there were great views back down to Sibleyback and the land all around.

Leaving the Tor we headed north east along near the side of a dry stone wall heading initially towards the Cheeswring about 1.5 miles away to the north east.

We swung more east and then south east as we crossed Craddock Moor and Caradon Hill loomed large ahead of us.

We made our way by some concreted areas which I understand were once firing ranges, I'm not sure if they were military or not.



Ahead of us were three large stone circles and a few standing stones, the stone circles are collectively known as the Hurlers and the standing stones are called the Pipers.

How the stones got those names are explained on the information board in the Minions car park just 300 metres to the

south east.

A few minutes later and we were back at the car park.

Quite a few people stopped to read the information board to find out more about the Hurlers and the Pipers.

It had been another enjoyable walk and one full of interest for me and everyone else too.

Those with inquisitive minds surely can't but imagine how different the area must have been like over a century ago when over 3000 people worked the mines there. The noise, bustle and smells must have been amazing.



Thanks were given to Dave Tromans for planning this route leading us around on a very different route to the normal one we follow. I've now ticked off yet another high point I'd visited.

Minions is only 22 miles from Plymouth and is therefore nearer to us in Plymouth than many areas in Northern and Eastern Dartmoor, well worth a 30 minute drive to Liskeard and up to Bodmin moor via St Cleer, which I think is the easiest approach route to use.