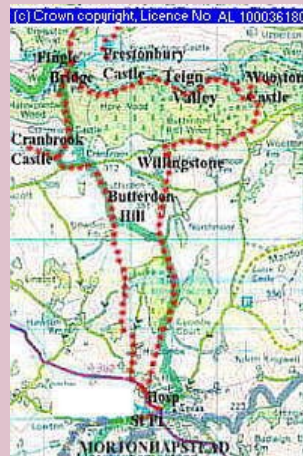


THE THREE CASTLES WALK FROM MORTONHAMPSTEAD START POINT: 751860

John Smith has a keen interest in the archaeology of Dartmoor and he offered the walk visiting three iron age hill forts north of Mortonhamstead on Wednesday 8th Nov 00. The walk was 11.5 miles and graded as strenuous since the hill forts sit either side of the River Teign valley and there were a couple of very steep climbs up from Fingle Bridge to visit Prestonbury and finally Cranbrook castle.

Despite the absence of several of the regular walkers who were in the Himalayas, the walk still attracted 13 walkers, several of whom were from another Devon group, the moorland group, who are always welcome to walk with us.



An outline of the route taken is shown above. This outline should be related to a suitable map of Dartmoor such as the OS Outdoor Leisure map no 28 of Dartmoor.



At 10 AM the group left the car park, made their way through Mortonhamstead and up towards the hospital. Just beyond the cottage hospital on the Chagford Road we turned right up Queens road and soon were on the footpath heading north.

The footpath sign indicates a route to Willingstone Cottage, getting on for 2 miles to the north. It is an easy to follow footpath generally up hill through

fields and paths.

After 0.75 mile you reach Hill Farm Cottages and a lane. Continue up the lane a short distance, the lane swings east and a footpath continues straight on.

Continue along roughly north skirting the eastern edge of Butterdon Down.



In the distance on 020 degrees can be seen Willingstone Rock. Head for it along clear tracks.



Cross a narrow road, and into a field with Willingstone Rocks to the right and a large rock in a garden to the left by the lower corner of the field.

Cross field on about 010 to far corner and into a copse. Follow an indistinct path down through the wooded area and emerge onto Willingstone Cottage

and a narrow road heading west to east.

Depending on the pace of the walk it could take an hour or more to reach this cottage from the car park in Mortonhamstead.

Turn right and follow the narrow road for 3/4 mile east slightly uphill skirting a plantation on the left. You should see a signpost indicating the Teign Valley on the left entering a plantation.

Turn left and follow the path down until a junction is found.



Take the left turning and head down to a memorial stone. This memorial is to one of the rangers who worked in the area.

Turn right and walk along and around a path skirting the ditch surrounding the first of the 3 iron age hill castles, Wooston Castle.

Climb up what is left of the ramparts and you can see the flattish area showing the extent of the fort.

There are excellent views of the Teign Valley from the ramparts and it makes a good morning break stop.

Retrace steps along the defence ditch and if you take the first track descending down to the Teign there is a very steep zig zag descent of less than half a mile, could be very slippery. Soon you will be at the River Teign at the bottom of the valley.



It is better to go further back along the track and then turn right where the track down is far less steep and will eventually reach to the River Teign much nearer Fingle Bridge than if you take the steep descent down.



Whichever path down to the Teign you take there is a wide path along side the Teign. Turn left and head upstream along the banks of the river heading for Fingle Bridge.

Close to the bridge you will walk by the ruins of Fingle Mill and shortly after the local beauty spot of Fingle Bridge and the Anglers Rest pub on the other

bank will be there for you to savour.

In the summer you'll find plenty of people around here in and around the large parking area.

Cross Fingle Bridge and continue up along the road away from Fingle Bridge, after a few hundred yards at Couples Corner, road swings sharp left with minor road to the right.

Take the minor road and a short steep few hundred yard ascent follows. Depending on your lungs it will take 10/15 minutes mins to reach Preston Farm.



On the right just before Preston Farm, there is a permissive path up south west between hedges up to a field and Prestonbury Common. Follow the path up and enter a field through a gate.

Still climbing up through the field the second iron age hill castle is reached. From the ramparts of Prestonbury

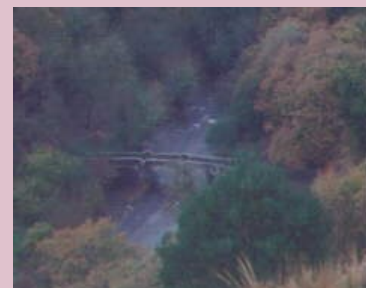
Castle there are superb views across to Drewsteignton and beyond to the main A30 dual carriageway.

We stopped here for lunch and to enjoy the views

There is a superb view looking down onto Fingle Bridge right below us and up the wooded valley.

The castle sits a full 500 ft above the Fingle Bridge and you should take the opportunity of a walk around the ramparts of the fort and the 360 degree views are very spectacular and are well worth the climb all the way up from Fingle Bridge.

The picture on the right was taken by that Ace Dartmoor photographer David (Bailey) Beattie with his excellent zoom lens digital camera from the ramparts looking straight down onto the bridge.



You have to retrace your steps all the way down again to Fingle Bridge. It takes less out of you than the climb up!!

Cross Fingle Bridge and look for the path ahead of you sign posted to Cranbrook Castle. A serious uphill section follows for a good mile uphill along a steep zig zagged path up through the woods to the top of the hill.

You will be lucky to complete the ascent in under 35 minutes, or longer if you get out of breath easily. After the ascent you will appreciate why the walk is graded as strenuous. There are several rest points some with good views up the Teign Valley to Castle Drogo.



At the top there is a turning right through a gate. From the gate walk up across Cranbrook Down and the large Cranbrook Castle at the top. The ramparts can be walked and the defensive ditch is still clearly visible.

Look around the top and the views are magnificent, Castle Drogo can very clearly be seen. If you know

Dartmoor you will be able to pick out lots of landmarks including some of the highest Tors on Dartmoor.

When you have walked the ramparts and enjoyed the wonderful view, retrace your steps down to the entrance gate.

From gate turn right and head out to a road. Turn left onto the road and follow road down passing Cranbrook Farm. Near the dip in the road is a signpost south east.

Follow it and after an easy uphill section you will emerge on Butterdown Down with a good standing stone. We stopped here for an afternoon break before the last couple of miles back to Mortonhampstead.



Continue on heading south with Bowden Farm on your right hand side. You will pass through 4 or 5 fields and a copse before you emerge onto a narrow road.



Be warned from here on back there are plenty of stiles to test your balance, some of them quite difficult to cross.

Cross a road and follow the footpath still heading south, the path is narrow and can be overgrown in places for a couple of hundred yards.

You will soon enough enter a field. Keep to the right hand side of the next 3 fields with stiles of varying quality to climb over to transit between fields.

On entering the fourth field swing across the field to the opposite corner and emerge over a stile and descending stone steps onto a narrow road which descends very steeply due south.

Walk down the steeply descending road for 400 yards or so and you will emerge onto a wider road, with Mortonhampstead and 30 mph sign and thence left onto the A382 for the final 300 yards into Mortonhampstead itself.



You will pass the hospital and the turning taken at the start of the walk.

Continue on down into the town and turn right at the town centre and follow the Postbridge road for the 200 yards back to the car park.



At the back of the car park sit Mortonhampstead outdoor swimming pool. It is naturally closed in winter but in the summer it could be a lovely way of ending the walk, but not of course for washing your boots.

Everyone agreed that it had been an excellent walk with plenty of interest throughout. John had done his homework and was a fund of knowledge throughout making it a most entertaining and worthwhile day.

We had been reasonably lucky with the weather with sunny intervals during the morning and only short but sharp showers from lunchtime onwards.

Thanks to John and his trusty back marker for their efforts and all agreed it was well worth the drive out to Mortonhampstead.