

PRINCETOWN AREA AND DARTMOOR PRISON

START POINT GRID REF: 589 753

In the summer months the ramblers put on evening walks of about 5 miles starting at 7 PM. One advertised caught our eye since Ivan Mead had organised one walking the bounds of the prison, outside the wall and following the Drakes Leat for a while. It was scheduled for Thursday 22nd July 99.

The evening was a sunny one, but with a stiff North breeze blowing the temperature up in the Princetown area was quite a few degrees lower than in Plymouth. That evidently doesn't deter ramblers for there were over 40 of us congregating in the Princetown Car Park

. Leaving the car park we headed north and our first port of call was a graveyard. Ivan had some interesting stories about how the graves came to be there. There were lots of gravestones of French Prisoners of War way back in the Napoleonic War period. There had been an epidemic and many had died whilst building the prison.



We made our way to the road heading towards Tavistock and walked up to the entrance to the Farm part of the prison. We had to climb over the gate and were immediately under camera surveillance but they were aware that we were to follow the wall of the prison so we were not challenged.

We made our way to the big old wall around the prison and followed it until we came upon the memorial stones to the French and to the American prisoners of war who had died here a couple of hundred years ago. French yes but Americans.

Apparently following the War of Independence Americans had come across the Spain to support the French in their conflict against the British.

There was a war called the Peninsula War as part of the Napoleonic Wars, Helen was once again a prime source of information, what a memory she has!!



At one stage the sky was full of rooks I've never seen so many in one place, almost darkened the sky. Perhaps they are in training for an escape lift out. Having seen the memorials we continued around the outside of the wall before turning left down over a hill to the Devonport Leat. We then followed the leat right around the East side of the



prison, just below the leat was a very marshy area, it would have been difficult for prisoners to escape in that direction.

There was a very strange bridge over the marsh however, as can be seen in the photograph, it was very narrow, barely a couple of feet wide and most definitely a footbridge. We continued along the leat heading South and we left eaded the prison area crossing over the Princetown to Two Bridges Road. We continued to follow the leat until we came to habitation after a mile or so.



We dropped down to the house and then turned right and followed a road up past a place called Tor Royal, after some Royal personage who had stayed there. We continued up a road until we met a small road which linked Princetown and Whiteworks, some old workings.



We walked along the roads for a couple of hundred yards and then cut up onto the moors making for South Hessary Tor, a small Tor right beside a well trodden path called The Abbots Way, so called because the Abbots used to carry the dead from Buckfastleigh along this path to another monastery at Tavistock.

Don't know why and I forgot to ask Helen so this part of the history lesson will have to wait for another day I'm afraid.

The sun at this point of the evening was very low in the sky as it was approaching 9PM and the Television mast at North Hessary Tor was very difficult to pick out in the bright late evening sun.

The last part of the walk was easy going along the Abbots Way for a half a mile or so back to Princetown. There were campers in the field just behind the Plume of Feathers, where a few of the group stopped for a well earned drink. Just as Ivan had predicted we were back again at the car park by 9 PM and ready for the 12 mile drive back to Plymouth.



Thanks Ivan for putting on the walk, good and interesting.

We headed off but stopped to slake our thirst at the Burrator Inn, a well known free house on the main road at Dousland. It had been a very different evening from my normal one and I felt quite pleased with my days activities since I had spent four hours at sea in Tudor Rose in 20 kt winds, only returning home at 5.30 to set off again for the walk. I thought I deserved a drink after all that activity.