

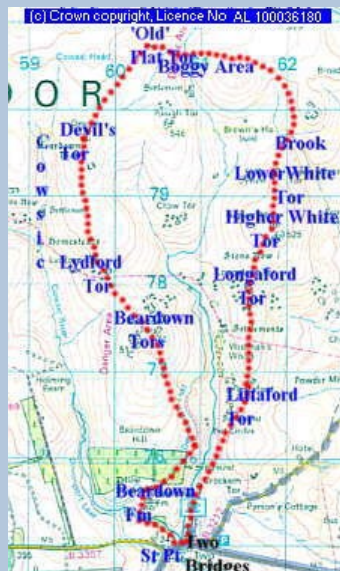
DARTMOOR TO THE NORTH OF TWO BRIDGES START POINT GRID REFERENCE: 607 752

Two Bridges is a popular starting point for Dartmoor walks and usually the walks are to the north east of the starting car park or south of it.

The 11 mile walk led by Norman Chynoweth on the 16th Aug 00 was different in that it was to the north but took in both sides of the West Dart River including an area within the Merrivale Range.

He was able to lead us into this normally out of bounds area because there is no firing on any of the Dartmoor ranges during August.

The forecast for the day was showers. In reality there were no showers at all and plenty of long sunny periods. In total we had 18 ramblers gathered for the walk including a visiting Rambler from Wales who had asked to walk with us whilst she was in Plymouth for the week.



An outline of the route that we took north of Two Bridges is shown above. To better appreciate the route taken this outline should be related to a 1:25000 Ordnance Survey map of Dartmoor and to the description of the walk given below. The best map to use is the 1:25000 outdoor leisure map no 28 of Dartmoor.



After a briefing from Norman at 10AM on the route we would be taking, we left the car park at Two Bridges through the gate at the back of the park and headed off up towards the moors alongside a broad path running along the eastern side of the West Dart river.

We soon reached farm buildings with good views up the East Dart Valley. Passing by the farm we continued up following the signposts heading up towards the Moor.

A short distance further on we had a choice of continuing along the side of the West Dart heading up to Wistmans Wood by the side of the river or turning up towards the higher moors.

Normally we head up to Crockern Tor as the nearest Tor to visit and then follow the ridge up to the higher Tor.

On this walk we gave Crockern Tor a miss and headed up towards Littaford Tor.



Although a steady uphill climb we made good time as we crossed the high stile over the dry stone wall and headed up towards Littaford Tors.

Littaford Tors is indeed a collection of the granite outcrops rather than being a single Tor, hence the plural of Tors.

Passing Littaford Tors we continued to head north and climb up to the next Tor along the ridge, distinguished by the large cone of rocks which makes it quite a

distinctive Tor among the Tors in the area.

This Tor is known as Longaford Tor and we were soon making our way up, still north towards the highest Tor on the ridge, that of Higher White Tor, less than half a mile NNE of Longaford Tor.



This Tor is at a height of 527 m and we had been climbing, easily but steadily since we had left the Two Bridges Car Park which is at a height of 343 m. We arrived at Higher White Tor at just after 11 PM and had climbed a little under 200 metres or about 5 to 600 feet. We had made good progress with the easy walking but the easy relatively dry walking across short cropped grass was all to change in the sections to follow.



After coffee and enjoying the views from Higher White Tor we were on our way again still heading north for the under half a mile leg down to Lower White Tor, at 507 metres, it is lower and therefore deserves its prefix.

Across the valley a half a mile NNW of us we could see the ruin of Browns House framed by the large hill immediately behind it.

Over the past four days we had had approaching 50 mm of rain on Dartmoor and the normally boggy area between us and Brown's House would be decidedly boggy and perhaps very very wet.

Norman had already decided that it would be best to head for the corner of wall at Hollowcombe bottom a few hundred yards north of us and then swing up and around onto the hill behind Browns House, rather than risk the direct route across the valley.

We were soon approaching the stream at Hollowcombe Bottom and crossing the stream there without undue difficulty.



Ignoring the bull in the next field, hedged and wire fenced thank god we swung up towards the left hand side of a Tor to our North East. The OS map doesn't even offer it a name and yet it is much larger than many of the Tors around which do seem to merit their own names.

We gradually left the short grass and still heading north started to meet rather more tussocky and boggy areas.

Norman advised us that the next section would be a little marshy, a slight understatement, very wet in places and the section extended for the next three miles as we swung around in a large arc.

We gradually swung more westwards and headed to the right of the top of the hill behind Brown's House. At 539 metres it is higher than Higher White Tor and yet has no name on the OS map.

We squelched our way westwards, even at the top it was still decidedly damp and marshy.

Over the top we went and then down the other side heading in the general direction of a range marker.

Norman advised us that we would be heading for where Flat Tor used to be. Used to be because on the latest OS map Flat Tor had been moved a half a mile north of where it appeared on the previous version.



As we descended to near the range marker we had a little obstacle to ford, that of the West Dart River, only a mere brook at this point however and we were soon on the other side.

Once across the West Dart we were in the Merrivale Range area, normally out of bounds to walkers

weekdays apart from in August. Into normally forbidden territory from this point and for the next 3 to 4 miles of the walk.

In the distance we could see a flat rock with some ponies which was the location of the 'old' Flat Tor.

But before we could reach the site of the lunch break and the ponies we had another brook to navigate, that of Summer Brook.

I notice that the lunch break point of the 'old' Flat Tor is now apparently shown on the map as Horse Hole, well there were some ponies there and a flat rock as you can see in the accompanying photograph.



The sun decided to go in during the break and we soon cooled down in the breeze.

After approaching a half an hour break we were off again heading uphill in the general direction of the top of the North Hessary Tor mast on a bearing of about 200 degrees.



Not far from the Horse Hole there is a granite rock with a plaque on it indicating a memorial to Panda who died in 1992 at the age of 18, a dog, a panda or whatever, there was a small silver plaque firmly cemented to the rock as a memorial.

After a short period of conjecture as to what animal it was we were on our way again.

The springy boggy and tussocky conditions prevailed as we ploughed on trying to avoid the very worst areas of wet ground, not always possible however as one member of the group found out with water up to his knees, he is very tall, for some in the group it would have approached their waists.

To the east of us on high ground was Rough Tor with its flag poles which normally carried red flags warning us to keep away. After just under a half a mile we saw a standing stone and a rocky outcrop near it. The standing stone is called the Beardown Man Standing Stone and the rocky outcrop, Devils Tor, I guess there is a reason for both names but unless I do some research it will remain a mystery.



Immediately in front of us lay a large and very steep valley, one that I never knew even existed, never having visited it before. I was advised that the valley was called Cowsic Valley, another graphic name which conjures up a number of images.



We didn't descend into this steep valley but continued along maintaining our height and heading south. En route we passed a classic Dartmoor pool.

It reminded me of the pool at the top of the National Marine Aquarium which has a theme from the Dartmoor upland areas at the top down to the sea and the depths at the bottom of the aquarium.

Heading more or less south we climbed over a stile and by Lydford Tor at 500m and then on to a clutch of Tors a half a mile on, some quite large which are collectively known as Beardown Tors.



We could see right across the West Dart Valley to the Tors we had been walking up during the morning part of the walk and we were now well on our way back towards Two Bridges once again.

We were now leaving the Merrivale Range area after our excursion into the Military firing area, hadn't seen any bombs or indeed any evidence of the military at all other than a few huts and range marker flag poles scattered around.

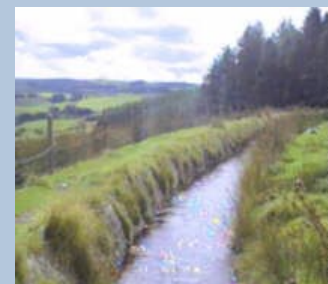


From here on down it was all downhill with a gradual descent down SSE down to a gate through a dry stone wall.

As we made our way through the gate there were good views of the West Dart Valley and of the Devonport Leat which runs along towards Burrator many miles on.

We gradually descended to the leat a couple of hundred yards before it leaves open moorland and makes its way through a forestry plantation.

We stopped by the leat for afternoon tea at about 2.10 PM before the final section back and around to the car park.



We followed the route of the leat through the wood and a couple of hundred yards after it emerged from the woods we turned sharp left and made our way down a track and past Beardown Farm and down to where there was a bridge over the fast flowing Cowsic River.

We crossed the bridge and could either continue along a track or turn left.



Immediately over the bridge we turned sharp left, some of us stopped to try and find the names of poets cut into the large stones just below the bridge, without too much success incidentally as the names are being covered by lichen unfortunately.

The path ran down alongside the Cowsic river for a short while where the river tumbled down over many large rocks.

Soon, where the river veered off to the left to flow into the West Dart our path took us along a footpath through fields and over a couple of stiles to the point where it emerged onto the main road a couple of hundred yards west of Two Bridges.



Shortly after we crossed one of the two bridges giving the place its name where there were good views of the second, much older bridge which no longer carries traffic.



The location is a popular visitor spot with the Two Bridges Hotel, restaurant and pub just opposite our car park in the old quarry.

We arrived back at just gone 3 PM after a reasonably fast paced 5 hour walk including stops. Norman had indicated an 11 mile moderate walk and indeed it was.

Although there were no major steep ascents, rather longer and easier ones instead, the marshy ground and tussocks and generally wet areas had made it quite a hard walk at times.

Once again it had been a good days walking and the weather had been very kind to us. It hadn't rained, the visibility had been excellent giving wonderful views and although not cold, neither had it been too hot for comfortable walking.

Our visiting rambler from Wales was still smiling and talking and obviously will be able to compare the Dartmoor terrain with the Brecon Beacons.

We thanked Norman for his efforts in managing and recceing the walk with his usual dry wit and we were off for the drive back to the City of Plymouth.