

VENFORD RESERVOIR TO HUNTINGDON WARREN VIA RYDERS HILL START POINT GRID REF: 685715

The walk from Venford Reservoir was led by John Davies on Wednesday 26th April 2000 and as we drove from the car share point up onto Dartmoor the heavens opened, again, in keeping with the weather pattern most days during April.

We maintained a positive outlook, oh it's bound to stop. Well it didn't during the morning, but it did stop from being a downpour to just being heavy. Despite the weather, 12 intrepid ramblers gathered at the start point and after a briefing from John on the route we were off, well clad in wet weather gear.



The outline map above showed the approximate route we took on this scheduled 8 mile moorland walk.

To gain a clear indication of the route taken this outline should be followed with reference to a 1:25000 map of Dartmoor plus the description of the walk which follows.

We left the car park at the reservoir crossed the road and began the major ascent of the day up to Ryder's Hill, a good two and a half miles away to the south west. At a height of 515 metres, it was a good 700 ft higher than the reservoir.

The initial plan was to walk to Dry Lake mine and then walk due south the 1.5 miles to Ryder's Hill. Unsurprisingly, there were no apparent reference points to guide us up to the Dry Lake Mine and John took us on a bearing of 260 degrees which should have eventually brought us to Dry Lake.



The group kept quite close together and we were therefore surprised to see one person a couple of hundred yards behind us after about 20 minutes of the uphill stint. We waited, wondering who it could be, and then realised it was trusty Jack Sycamore who had arrived a little late, thanks to dustbin chores and had managed to catch us up, almost.... Better late than never.

We regrouped and stopped to admire the panorama of the view, looking back down into the valley to our North East.

The view below was much more interesting than the tussocky rough featureless moorland uphill ahead of us.

The only way that we could tell that we were on track, in the poor very wet conditions, was when we crossed some mine workings which were indicated on the map.

Because of the conditions John decided to shorten the walk slightly. Before reaching the mine, we veered left and turned more south towards Ryder's Hill, rather than continuing on the final half a mile to Dry Lake.

Unsurprisingly after all the rain, the ground was saturated with plenty of very wet areas to walk through. The combination of the tussocks and the saturated ground made this uphill section relatively hard going.

Crossing a couple more girts, we finally arrived at the top of Ryder's Hill. It isn't classified as a Tor as there are no rocks there, just a trig point and some other markers. The map indicates there is a cairn there, well I couldn't see one.

Even the top of Ryder's Hill was unusually devoid of natural features, surprising as it is one of the highest points on Southern Dartmoor.



After a short break for coffee in the rain, we headed off towards the next point en route, Huntingdon Warren about another 1.5 miles away almost due south, on a bearing of 170 degrees approximately.

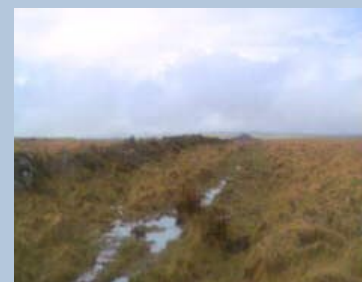
The weather was at last improving and the skies lightened, the rain eased and there was even a hint of blue sky away to the north.

We passed another girt, a deepish cutting for those not steeped in dartmoor terminology and continued on, at least it was slightly downhill, a change from the climb up to Ryder's Hill.

Eventually we came to an old moss covered dry stone wall which seemed to go on for miles.

Looking north, in the distance the old spoil tip of the long disused Red Lake china clay works was visible, often used as an easily identifiable landmark for moorland walks.

We continued on towards the top of Huntingdon Warren but when still about a half a mile away, we swung left onto a bearing of 145 degrees and descended downhill and into a valley with a brook running down through it.



Inevitably there was plenty of surface water and in boggy conditions we descended into the warren itself with some excellent examples of dry stone wall corrals for sheep to our right.



When we came to cross Western Wella brook, we found a small clapper bridge to walk over, so no leaping required this time.

A few yards further on, we stopped for lunch and to enjoy the views down the valley and across to the dry stone wall enclosed fields mentioned before.

This point in the valley containing brook which we had just crossed via the clapper bridge was the furthestest point away from Venford Reservoir for us on this walk.

Following lunch, we headed uphill on a bearing of 060 degrees, over short moorland grass and following sheep paths up the hill towards Pupers Hill, a half mile away at the top.

Compared with the tussocks we had been walking across earlier, this was easy walking up to the top.



This hill has many more interesting features than did Ryder's Hill. It has rocks and is therefore a Tor and 100 yards from the Tor there is an excellent example of a conical cairn.

After a short stop to admire the cairn, we headed off on a bearing of 020 degrees. We followed the contours and descending gradually as we made our way across and below Snowdon and down into the Mardle valley, about a hundred metres lower in altitude than Pupers Hill.



Apart from the odd girt, we had to scramble down into, walking was easy as we descended. When we finally arrived at the valley bottom the next problem was how to cross the river Mardle, no clapper bridges here.

Luckily we were near Mardle Head and consequently the river itself was quite narrow in places just below it's source. With a certain degree of luck, we all managed to bound from rock to rock and got to the other side without falling in.

We picked our way across the broad valley floor and then followed a track up the other side heading more or less due north. As the ground levelled out again at about 400 metres, we could see the Venford Reservoir one mile due north of us.



All we had to do was to slowly descend, picking our way through mine workings at one point, down towards the reservoir and the car park to the left hand side at the far end of the reservoir.



Once again the walking was relatively easy and as we approached the reservoir the rain started again, although relatively lightly.

The reservoir is at a height of 300 metres and we skirted along the western side of it looking down through the fir trees surrounding it.

A few minutes later and we were back in the car park at 2 PM, almost exactly four hours after leaving it.

Thanks were passed on to John Davies for leading the walk and we just made it into the cars as the rain started in earnest once more. We had covered about 7.5 miles and had tested our wet weather gear, during the morning particularly.

It is worth noting that in Plymouth, apart from one shower at 9AM, when we were leaving the car share point at Roborough, there had been no rain during the day. Once more it proves the point that the water is always dumped on the higher ground as the south westerly air stream rises over the hills of Southern Dartmoor. It certainly did on this walk.