

THE PACK-HORSE ON DARTMOOR.

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(Read at Princetown, 19 July, 1905.)

WAYFARING across Dartmoor was very different in the middle of the eighteenth century from what it is to-day, for the broad macadamized roads which now traverse the moor from east to west were not made until about 1792. This date is recorded on a tablet of stone inserted on the north side of the bridge at Dartmeet.

Although Dartmoor as a district must have been almost an unknown region to most folk, it was crossed by wayfarers bound east or west, for the direct track from Exeter to Truro ran across it, via Chagford and Tavistock.

As far as the moor is concerned, this trackway was but a rough horsepath, which probably followed an even more ancient footpath.

The roads of West Devon in the middle of the eighteenth century are described¹ as mere gullies, worn by torrents in the rocks, similar to steps in staircases, with fragments of rocks lying loose in the hollows. It is stated, with little if any latitude, that this part of the county did not possess a single carriage with wheels, nor, fortunately for the necks of the travellers, any horses but those which were natives of the county.

Donn's Map of Devon (London, 1765), shows the then existing road, passing from Exeter by Dunsford and Upton to Chagford, and thence across the moor to Tavistock.

In the same Atlas is a map displaying a considerable slice of the Forest of Dartmoor, and giving this road more in detail. We learn from this that the highway was carried over the Teign by Clifford Bridge, and thence by Wooston and Cranbrook Farms to Upton and Chagford.

Leaving this moorland town, the track went by Way

¹ Marshall's "Rural Economy of the West of England," London, 1796.

across Chagford Common and joined the present road at the western foot of Merripit Hill, leaving Lower Merripit on the left and Higher Merripit on the right. Hartland is indicated on the right, and the road is shown crossing the East Dart, but no bridge is indicated, an omission on the part of the surveyor, for this structure was then in existence. This is also the case with the passage over the Cherrybrook. The road then skirts the foot of Crockern Tor, and proceeds to Twobridges, crossing the West Dart by one bridge and the Cowsic by another. It then climbs the hill and proceeds in a straight line for Merivale Bridge, passing by Moortown, to Tavistock.

Donn also shows a road leading from Moretonhampstead by Wormhill, Beeton Cross, and Barrowmoor Bridge, past Newhouse, and joining the trackway to Chagford near the foot of Merripit Hill.

The horse-paths are still visible in places, and appear as shallow trenches, with low banks on either hand.

When pack-horses were used on the Moreton track, Newhouse, or, as it is now called, the Warren House Inn, was on the right-hand side of the road proceeding from Postbridge towards Moreton, and it is so shown on Donn's map. This old building was burnt down some years ago, and was rebuilt where it now stands in 1845 by J. Wills on the other side of the present road, which here occupies the site of the ancient pack-horse way. Donn locates a potato market at about the site of the "Saracen's Head," Twobridges. Evidently an open-air market, for no building apparently existed on the spot in 1765.

The neighbourhood of Chagford and Moretonhampstead is still noted for the quality of its potatoes, and in the eighteenth century these districts almost monopolized the local production of these tubers. Pack-horses carried them in large quantities to the market at Twobridges, where they were sold to dealers, who came from Plymouth, Tavistock, and districts south and west of Dartmoor. Marshall refers to this monopoly as existing about 1770 to 1775, and states that it was gradually broken down when it was discovered that potatoes could be profitably grown on the west side of Dartmoor as well as on the east.

In many of the southern and western districts the cultivation was severely handicapped, for leases of only a century since forbade the growth of potatoes beyond what was absolutely necessary for the use of the tenant and his family.

Landlords and tenants on the eastern side of the moor were more enlightened, and as a consequence they enjoyed for many years a lucrative monopoly.

"*Britannia Depicted, or Ogilby Improv'd*" (London, 1720), contains a chart of the main road from Exeter to Truro, and the section from Chagford to Tavistock gives details of cross-roads branching from same, mileage, particulars of bridges, prominent stones, hills, and places contiguous to the road.

It also shows what portion of road was in enclosed country, and it is interesting to note the fact that three miles out of Chagford there were no enclosures from that point (excepting a small piece between Higher and Lower Merripits, Postbridge) until the moor is left under Cocks Tor—a distance of nearly thirteen miles. At the nineteenth mile from Exeter and the fourth from Chagford an upright stone, called the Heath Stone, is depicted standing near the trackway, and to the north-west of same.

It can still be recognized—somewhat mutilated—and is interesting, for it formed one of the ancient bondstones of the Forest of Dartmoor.

The headwaters of the Wallabrook, which were passed close to the present Stats Bridge, are described as "a rill," and were forded, for no bridge is mentioned.

At the western foot of Merripit Hill another standing stone is shown, and is labelled, "A stone called Merripit turn about Brook." There is still a block of granite which has evidently been "placed" at the spot indicated, and although it is not of the "pillar" character, it is probably the selfsame stone which is so peculiarly named by the ancient surveyor. The old pack-horse bridge at Postbridge is described as "Post-Stone Bridge—3 arches," and herein we probably have the origin of the name of this moorland hamlet.

Certain writers have seen in this erection an ancient British bridge, but its antiquity does not probably date further back than late mediæval times.

Some of the slabs resting on the piers still show the shallow and wide jumper holes which were made in removing them from their parent blocks of stone, which the writer believes he has located on the summit of Bellaford Tor, for these correspond with the very large, thin slabs which form the roadway of the bridge and possess similar holes.

The bridge imposts are so large (they weigh over six tons each) that they could hardly be obtained except from some tor, and Bellaford is a handy and probable location.

Proceeding west, the Cherrybrook was crossed by a stone bridge, probably a "clapper," and most likely on the site of the present erection, and the track proceeds to the foot of "a Rocky Hill call'd Crockern Tor," and thence to Twobridges.

A stone bridge is mentioned crossing the West Dart, but none over the Cowsic, although, like Donn, Ogilby depicts the track as crossing the two rivers. That there were two bridges at some time is indicated in the name, which is at least as old as 1765.

From this point the track ran straight to Rundle Stone (a menhir now non-existent), crossing the Blackabrook by a ford, and over the Walkham by a stone bridge of two arches, and thence to the enclosed country on the summit of Pork Hill.

The named cross-roads leading from the main trackway between Chagford and Tavistock are numerous, and many of these still exist.

The by-track to Plymouth left the main road a little west of Twobridges, and closely followed the present road to Princetown, crossing the Blackabrook at Okery over a clapper bridge, which is still standing.

There were other roads, not noticed by either Ogilby or Donn, for these dealt with the main routes.

One, leading from Ashburton to Tavistock, passed by Holne and the Forest Inn, Hexworthy, across the moor to where Princetown now stands, and thence to Merivale Bridge. From Yellowmead to Merivale Bridge the site of the trackway is still marked by some stone guide-posts bearing on their faces the letters **A** and **T**, and so placed that the direction of each place is indicated.

Lydford was reached across the moor to Brousentor, and thence by a ford and stepping-stones over the Tavy, just above Coffin Wood.

The Lichway crossed the same river a little above this point at Willsworthy Steps. The name and tradition indicate that this ancient pathway was the route traversed by mourners carrying their dead to the parish church at Lydford prior to 1260, when Bishop Bronescombe transferred certain tenements lying in the neighbourhood of Postbridge to Widecombe.

The Lichway may be traced from a point in Beardown Newtake to the headwaters of the Cowsic, thence by a ford over the Walkham to White Barrow; beyond this point it gets confused with turf tracks, but apparently headed away by Baggator and Brousentor for Willsworthy Steps.

These stepping-stones, eighteen in number, are quite important, one being 10 feet long, and when properly maintained for use must have formed an easy passage over the river when not in flood. In heavy weather a long detour would have to be incurred, for it is very doubtful whether a Hill or a Harford Bridge existed, and if this was the case, Lydford could only be reached much lower down the river.

There were other bridle and foot paths crossing between the more direct roads from east to west, but for the moment we are more interested in the main horse-road leading from Chagford to Tavistock.

Over this the wayfarer could only proceed on foot or on horseback, and the eighteen miles traversed between these points was over a bleak and inhospitable moor. There was no place of public refreshment on the route unless deviations were made, or rest obtained at farmhouses, and these were few and far between. With the exception of Newhouse (now Warren House Inn), the two Merripits, and Hartland, the dreary wastes adjacent to the trackway were devoid of habitations until the neighbourhood of Tavistock was reached, so that a journey undertaken in mid-winter must have been arduous and even dangerous in thick or snowy weather. In deep snow the track was easily lost, and a stranger would run the risk of losing his way and perishing of cold.

It is quite probable that the story "Salting un in" is based on actual experience. The writer has known at least one winter experience where, even with good roads, but snow-covered, a body has been kept for such a length of time that the use of some homely salt would have been advantageous.

The corpse must be carried by hand irrespective of distance or difficulties. On no account would a cart or carriage be used as a hearse, for it "looked like getting rid of the lost one too quickly and easily."

Merchandise and farm produce were moved from place to place on pack-horses, and Youatt, in his book on the horse, states that the Devon variety was bred from the larger kind of Dartmoor and Exmoor animals. Welsh mares and a thoroughbred were also employed.

Writing about 1831, Youatt mentions that there were still some farms in secluded parts of Devon on which wheeled vehicles were unknown. Hay, corn, straw, fuel, stone, dung, and lime were carried on horseback; and in harvest, sledges drawn by oxen and horses were employed. He speaks of the

Dartmoor ponies as being much in request, being sure-footed and hardy, and admirably calculated to scramble over the rough roads and dreary wilds of that mountainous district.

They were existing on the moor, as they do to-day, in a state of nature, and with all the activity appertaining to such a condition. He relates that Captain Cotgrave, a former governor of the prison at Princetown, had a great desire to possess one of them of somewhat superior figure to its fellows, and having several men to assist him, they separated it from the herd and drove it on some rocks by the side of a tor. A man followed on horseback, while the captain stood below watching the chase. The little animal, being driven into a corner, leaped completely over the man and horse and escaped.

Pack-horses were improved by cross-breeding, and were trained to walk, when loaded, with long strides, this gait giving the most ease and ridding the ground the fastest.

The largest and strongest horses carried a burden of about 400 lb. on a journey, but mill-horses are quoted by Lawson, in the "Modern Farrier," as capable of carrying thirteen measures, which at a moderate computation amount to 910 lb. These were doubtless specially bred horses, and presumably such a weight would only be carried for short distances.

A team of pack-horses was six, but a smart man could manage seven.

The height most affected was fifteen hands—long, low, and lusty animals, not taken into work until they were six or seven years old.

The furniture of the pack-horse varied according to the material carried.

Some goods were carried in long narrow bags, two or three of which were thrown across the wooden pack-saddle.

Light articles of burden, such as hay, corn, straw, etc., were loaded between "crooks" formed of willow poles, seven or eight feet long, and bent bow shape, with one end much longer than the other. These were joined in pairs, with slight cross-bars eighteen inches to two feet long. Each horse was furnished with two pairs of these crooks slung together, so that the shorter and stronger ends lay easily and firmly against the pack-saddle; the longer and lighter ends rising some fifteen or more inches above the back of the horse, and standing four or five feet from each other. Within and between these "crooks" the load was piled and bound fast together.

Heavy articles, such as cordwood and large stones, were carried between "short crooks" of wood having four natural bends or knees; both ends being nearly of the same length, and in use the points stood nearly level with the ridge of pack-saddle.

Loose material, such as dung, sand, etc., was carried in "pots" or strong coarse panniers slung together like the "crooks," one on each side. The bottom of these pots had a falling door for discharging the loads.

In 1790 to 1795 a day's work for a grass-fed pack-horse, locally employed, was estimated at sixpence, with a stout lad as attendant receiving a like amount, whilst stable-fed horses were assessed at a value of one shilling per diem, and an adult attendant at the same sum.

When on travel many pack-horses and attendants would journey together, passing in single file through the narrow gullies dignified by the name of roads. These lanes, before the actual moor was reached, were on either hand, and often covered with coppice, and these Vancouver¹ describes as the exploration of a labyrinth rather than that of passing through a much-frequented country.

This first impression was, however, at once removed on the wayfarer meeting with or being overtaken by a string of pack-horses.

The rapidity with which these animals descended the hills when not loaded, and the utter impossibility of passing loaded ones, required that the utmost caution should be used in keeping out of the way of the one, and exertion in keeping ahead of the other.

A cross-way fork in the road or a gateway was eagerly looked for as a retiring spot for the traveller until the pursuing squadron or heavily loaded brigade had safely passed by.

¹ "General View of the Agriculture of the County of Devon," London, 1813.