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Walking the Antiquities of Dartmoor

Dartmoor has a particularly rich abundance of settlements, monuments and ritual sites dating from the Bronze Age. The mild hospitable climate deteriorated after a few thousand years leaving these areas uninhabited and consequently relatively undisturbed to the present day. There are many great guides to walking on Dartmoor, many include descriptions of these sites, but it is difficult to find guides specifically for those wanting to visit these sites. The Dartmoor Walks website suggests a few walks for those interested in visiting the ancient settlements and antiquities such as stone rows and stone circles on Dartmoor. The walks featured are all based on the use of public transport, see [Guide to Public Transport](#). Use the menu above or the walks bar on the right to navigate around the site. The sites featured are archaeological treasures and most are protected by the law, please treat these sites with respect!

Prehistoric Dartmoor

A Brief History of Prehistory

The first humans came out of Africa 2 million years ago. Around 1 million years ago Britain was connected to the continent and the first humans arrived in Britain. Flint tools found recently in Norfolk show that there were humans there 900 thousand years ago. These early humans were not Homo sapiens but of the same genus Homo. These hunter-gathers came and went with the successive ice ages during the Palaeolithic period. During the ice ages the region became unpopulated. During successive inter-glacial periods humans returned. In Devon the earliest known site used by these people is at Kent's Cavern in Torquay. This dates from the Cromerian Interglacial (c 350000 - 250000 BC). 11 hand axes were found at Tavistock and in 1931 Worth found a flint implement of Palaeolithic type on Brent Moor. This would suggest Dartmoor was first exploited by humans in the Lower Palaeolithic although the evidence is weak.

The early Stone Age hunter-gather period, the Palaeolithic, encompasses around 99% of human history. It gave way after the last ice age, around 12 thousand years ago, to a gradual move towards farming - the Mesolithic or middle stone age period. The Mesolithic period produced distinctive flint tools. No early Mesolithic tools have yet been found on Dartmoor. Later Mesolithic flints have been found at Batworthy, Gidleigh Common, East Week and Ringhill in the Stannon Brook. Flint scatters have been found on Langstone Moor.

The pollen records show that after the last ice age Dartmoor initially became a heath land and then was wooded for thousands of years. Around 5000 BC there was a rapid period of deforestation. It is thought that the earliest Mesolithic farmers used slash and burn to create temporary clearings for hunting deer and for raising crops. These areas would rapidly become infertile and would be abandoned to re-grow. These early farmers are thought to have used wooden shelters and no evidence remains of their settlements. Later Neolithic farmers were more proficient in agriculture and started deliberately clearing large areas of forest for agricultural use. The charcoal deposits in the soil of this period provide evidence that Dartmoor was deforested due to fire. It cannot be proved that these fires were caused by these early farmers but it would seem most likely. The moorland landscape we see today is a direct consequence of this period. Trees only remained in the lowland river valleys and peat bogs started to form.

The Neolithic, or new stone age, farmers were more permanently settled than their Mesolithic predecessors. They started to use stone building materials for their settlements and monuments. Two settlements are thought to be early Neolithic, these are found on the hilltops of White Tor and Dewerstone. Chambered tombs (or their remains) such as those at Corringdon Ball, Cuckoo Ball and Spinsters Rock (near Drewsteignton) are from this period. Some of the stone rows and stone circles are also thought to date from this period. A recently discovered stone row on Cut Hill has been found to be embedded in peat that has been accurately carbon dated to 3500 BC, around a 1000 years before Stonehenge. Later Neolithic settlements consisting of "hut circles" can be seen all over Dartmoor except on the highest moorland. Stone monuments such as stone rows and stone circles arose near these settlements as well as cairn burial sites. It is likely that many of these sites are contemporary with Stonehenge, most are thought to have been constructed in the second millennium BC.

Suggested Walks

Burford, Stalldown and Upper Erme



Mardon Down



Lakehead Hill



An Age of Ages!

Anthropologists and archaeologists use a number of terms to describe periods. The Palaeolithic (c. 350000 - 10000 BC) is essentially the "old" Stone Age and can be roughly described as a hunter-gather period of development with more than one Homo species. The first Homo Sapiens arrived on the scene around 30,000 to 50,000 years ago and soon became the sole Homo species. The Mesolithic (c. 10000 - 4500 BC) or "middle" Stone Age signifies the start of farming and is the period between the Palaeolithic and the Neolithic or "new" stone age. The Neolithic period (c. 4500 - 2300 BC) is defined as when crop cultivation and farming has developed as a central feature of life and culture. The Stone Age is seen as spanning the Palaeolithic, the Mesolithic and the early Neolithic periods. The later Neolithic period sees the transition from the use of stone tools through to the age of widespread metal working, first the Bronze Age and then the Iron Age.

Dartmoor in the Bronze Age

Menhirs, Stone Rows, Stone Circles and Cairn Circles

There are around seventy six known stone rows and fourteen stone circles on Dartmoor and there are numerous menhirs or standing stones. The exact purpose of these prehistoric monuments is unknown but many have alignments to sunrise in mid-summer and mid-winter although there are many doubtful claims of alignments with various other astronomical objects such as stars (if lines are drawn through enough points such alignments will inevitably be "found"). Many of these monuments appear to be associated with nearby settlements and with burial sites. It would seem that most major prehistoric settlements on Dartmoor would have had their own monuments just as most villages in the historic period would have a local church, a centre for religious, ceremonial and social gatherings. Some of the sites on Dartmoor consist of settlements with nearby complexes of multiple monuments; Merrivale and Shovel Down complexes both have menhirs, stone rows and a stone circle and Drizzlecombe has impressive menhirs, stone rows and associated cairn circles.

The archaeologists define stone circles as being sites which do not contain burials and as such are thought to be purely ritual monuments. Sites such as the Nine Maidens site on Belstone common are considered to be cairn circles rather than stone circles. Some cairn circles are found terminating stone rows, good examples being those found at Down Tor and the 2 mile long double stone row on the Erme plain. Some of the cairn circles have multiple circles, the best examples being the four-fold cairn circles at Yellowmead and Shovel Down. Many of the monumental sites on Dartmoor were partially or totally reconstructed by the Dartmoor Preservation Committee in the early twentieth century. Fallen menhirs and ruined stone rows and circles were re-constructed with varying degrees of accuracy. The Scorhill and Grey Wethers stone circles are some of the best preserved examples.

Dartmoor Settlement and the Construction of the Reaves

Around 1700BC there was a major influx of settlers into Dartmoor. There are around 5000 'hut circles' on Dartmoor and it is estimated that the population on the moor would have been around 10,000 at its peak. There was a rapid decrease in woodland cover at this time. The stone circles and many, if not most, of the stone rows would have been constructed long before this period of settlement. These settlers were responsible for the remarkable construction of the widespread and systematic field boundaries known as reaves. Reaves cover vast expanses and were very carefully planned and constructed. In contrast to medieval boundaries, which tend to be higgledy-piggledy patchworks, reaves follow the contours, sometimes for miles, which must have involved a high degree of sophistication and technical skill in surveying and central planning.

Prehistoric Dartmoor Walks - Updates

This site has been evolving since first put together. A number of new walks will be shortly added, notably, starting from Ivybridge train station.

Any suggestions, corrections or comments on the site are most welcome!

A word for users of Internet Explorer 6: this site should render well in most modern browsers including Internet Explorer **after** version 6 which is very buggy when it comes to rendering the CSS (cascading style sheet) used on this website. The site maybe rewritten in the future to support IE 6 but in the meantime you will either have to upgrade to a later version or use alternatives such as Firefox or Opera and so on.

All the photos are taken by the author and non-commercial use is fine so long as credited to www.dartmoorwalks.org.uk.

Contact email: dartmoor AT exeterleft.freereserve.co.uk

Burrator & Downton



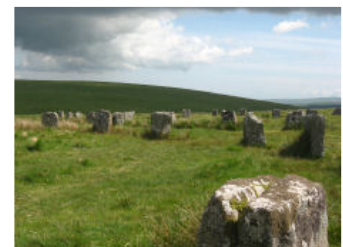
Yellowmead and Drizzlecombe



Ringmoor, Brisworthy Circle and Legis Pound



Fernworthy & Grey Wethers



Shovel Down & Scorhill

LAST UPDATES

Update 04/10/2010: Site title and banner changed to *Prehistoric Dartmoor Walks* to prevent confusion with other sites of a similar name.

Update 30/04/2011: Added the Guide to Public Transport.

Updates 9/5/2011: OS maps added to sites and OS Map routes added to walks.

Updates 22/5/2011: Moretonhampstead (Mardon Down) and Ivybridge (Erme West: Burford, Stalldown & Erme Stone Rows) walks and sites added.

Last Updated 23/05/2011

References

[Ancient stones older than Stonehenge discovered on Dartmoor](#)
[Stone row sheds new light on Dartmoor prehistoric life](#)
[The Legendary Cut Hill of Dartmoor](#)

Guide to Public Transport

During the summer there are a number of useful bus services across Dartmoor, especially using the Dartmoor Sunday Rover ticket. Most notably the Transmoor Link bus, but also the Dartmoor Line train service from Exeter St. Davids to Okehampton and the Tamar Valley Line from Plymouth to Gunnislake.

There are other services that are available all year round, including a much reduced bus service. The best options out of season are probably the train to Ivybridge and the X38 bus which goes through South Brent and Ivybridge.

The information below was last checked for accuracy on 30/4/11.

Useful links

Bus times can be checked on [Traveline SW](#) and train times on [National Rail Enquiries](#).

Devon County Council provide an excellent guide to bus services, see [Devon transport: Interactive bus map](#). It is not obvious when you first visit this site but you can zoom in to see the area you are interested in and then click on the route number which then gives you the option to get the relevant timetable.

See also [Dartmoor National Park Authority: Getting Around Dartmoor](#)

Dartmoor Sunday Rover

Travel on any of the services listed below on a Sunday. An adult day ticket costs £6.50. For more information see: [Devon County Council: Dartmoor Sunday Rover](#)

- All Stagecoach South West buses
- All First bus services in Devon, except 30 Taunton - Axminster, 31 Axminster - Weymouth and 92/192 Exeter - Taunton. Also valid on X53 as far as Weymouth
- Beacon Bus 118
- River Link service 100
- [Western Greyhound](#) services 510, 573, 592, and 599.
- First Great Western Tamar Valley Line trains between Plymouth and Gunnislake, Tarka Line trains between Barnstaple, Exeter and Digby & Sowton.

The reduced winter service runs between 26th September 2010 and 22nd May 2011

The summer service runs between 29th May 2011 and 18th September 2011

Transmoor Link (First Bus Service 82)

The Transmoor Link service goes across Dartmoor between Exeter and Plymouth. Stops include; Moretonhampstead, Warren House Inn, Postbridge, Two Bridges, Princetown, Sharpitor Car Park, Dousland (Burrator Inn). This service is a Sundays only and is greatly reduced on the winter timetable.

- [Transmoor Link 82 winter timetable](#) (Sundays: 26th September 2010 to 22nd May 2011)



Belstone & Cosdon hill



Soussons Common



Merrivale Complex



White Tor Fort & Langstone Moor

- [Transmoor Link 82 summer timetable](#) (Sundays: 29th May 2011 to 18th September 2011)

Exeter to Moretonhampstead via Dunsford (Country Bus 359)

Country Bus [359 Timetable](#) (Mondays to Saturdays: from 11/04/2011).

Exeter to Moretonhampstead via Drewsteington & Chagford (Dartline 173)

Dartline Coaches [173 Timetable](#) (Mondays to Saturdays: from 11/04/2011).

Haytor Hoppa: Newton Abbot to Widecombe circular via Bovey Tracey (Country Bus 271)

Country Bus [271 Timetable](#) (Saturdays only: 23rd April 2011 to 29th Oct 2011). See also [Dartmoor National Park Authority: Haytor Hoppa](#)

Exeter to Plymouth via South Brent & Ivybridge (Stagecoach X38)

Exeter, Drumbridges, Ashburton, Buckfastleigh, South Brent, Ivybridge, Plymouth (Mondays to Saturdays, also Sundays: from 11th April 2011). Stagecoach [X38 Timetable](#).

Train to Ivybridge (First Great Western Trains)

Regular trains daily all year from Exeter to Torbay and Plymouth [31 Train Timetable](#).



Stone Circles

The known stone circles on Dartmoor are as follows (list taken from Butler).

1. Langstone Moor
2. Fernworthy
3. Grey Wethers N
4. Grey Wethers S
5. Shovel Down
6. Scorhill
7. Buttern Hill
8. Little Hound Tor
9. Merrivale
10. Brisworthy
11. Down Ridge
12. Sherberton
13. Mardon Down
14. Sourton Tors?

Useful Links

[Dartmoor National Park Authority](#) The official national park web site has lost of useful information.

[Dartmoor Firing Notices](#)

[Virtually Dartmoor](#) Interactive Visits to the National Park

[Dartmoor Preservation Society](#)

[Met Office 5-Day Forecast for Tavistock](#)

[Dartmoor Photo Perspectives](#)

[Legendary Dartmoor](#)

[Richard Knight's Dartmoor Walks](#)

[The Dartmoor Society](#) an independent group dedicated to sharing well-researched information and promoting the well-being of Dartmoor and its communities.

[The Megalithic Portal](#) World-wide Ancient Site Database, Photos and Prehistoric Archaeology News with geolocation

Recommended Reading

Burnard, Robert *Dartmoor Pictorial Records* (Devon Books, 1986)
Butler, J. *Dartmoor Atlas of Antiquities* five volumes (Devon Books, 1994)
Crossing *Guide to Dartmoor* (Peninsula Press, 2001)
Dartmoor National Park Authority *A Guide to the Archaeology of Dartmoor* (Devon Books, 2003)
Fleming, A. *The Dartmoor Reaves* (Batsford, 1988)
Gerrard, S. *Dartmoor* (Batsford & English Heritage, 1997)
Gill, Crispin (editor) *Dartmoor: A New Study* (David & Charles, 1977)
Hemery, Eric *High Dartmoor* (Robert Hale, 1983)
Todd, Malcolm *The South West to AD 1000* (Longman, 1987)
Rainbird, Paul *A Guide to the Archaeology of South Devon* (Three Barrows Books, 2010)
Rowe, Samuel *A Perambulation of Dartmoor* (Devon Books, 1985)
Sale, R. *Dartmoor the Official National Park Guide* (Pevensey Press, 2000)
Stringer, C. *Homo Britannicus - The Incredible Story of Human Life in Britain* (Penguin, 2006)
White, Paul *Ancient Dartmoor - An Introduction* (Bossiney Books, 2000)
Woods, S. *Dartmoor Stone* (Devon Books, 1988)
Worth, R.H. *Worth's Dartmoor* (David & Charles, 1971)

Dartmoor Walking Guides

Earle, John *Dartmoor - Walks into History* (Halsgrove, 2003)
Tavy, P. *Walk Dartmoor (A Bartholomew Map & Guide)* (John Bartholomew & Son Ltd, 1987)
