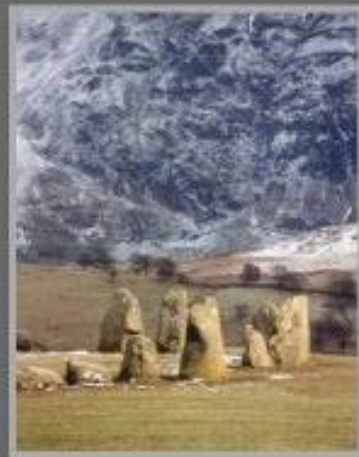


WALKING THROUGH
THE PAST - EXMOOR
& DARTMOOR



ALASDAIR
SHAW

SAMPLE

Into the Hills

Many of these walks are in the wilder areas of Britain. They often follow paths a long way from towns and roads. Occasionally they do not even follow paths but cross rough ground. It is therefore advisable that at least one person in the group be competent in that environment.

The routes are chosen to include interesting walking as well as several archaeological sites. This sometimes means that famous monuments get ignored as they are surrounded by tedious countryside or are isolated.

Navigation

The routes are described as they are walked but this is no substitute for having a map and compass and knowing how to use them, for when the fog comes down the instruction “head off towards Red Tor” is of little help. Compass bearings have been avoided throughout, as it is better to take them when they are needed. Without detailed use of a map some features are hard to find even on a clear day. Where possible the guide gives clues to finding such a site, but on an open moor this is often unachievable. Most of the time, however, the routes follow marked footpaths and bridleways.



Approximate timings have been given for the walks. These are the times I took to complete the route at what I'd call a gentle pace. That is, of course, a completely subjective assessment. You should judge for yourself how long you'll take, taking into account the composition of the group and the weather. Naismith's Rule is usually quoted at this point. There are many variations, particularly since metrification. The one that tends to work for an average group is four kilometres per hour on the flat plus

one minute for every 10m contour climbed. As you can guess the roughness of the ground will affect this. Don't forget to add time for rests, hunting for and exploring sites, and detours to avoid bogs.

Access issues are indicated in red. These include firing ranges, entrance fees and areas where the landowner's permission is needed. It cannot be assumed that a path described in this book will always be open to the public.

Clothing and Equipment

The weather in mountainous areas can be highly changeable. It is not uncommon for glorious sunshine to be replaced by rain or snow in a few minutes.



These two pictures taken in Great Langdale were shot within half an hour of each other. Within another thirty minutes the temperature had dropped to -6°C and the wind had got up to over 50mph.

Site of Neolithic axe factories.



This does mean you must go out prepared. Exactly what equipment you take is very much up to personal taste. Some old books would have you wearing tweeds to blend in with the vegetation but red socks in case you have an accident. The essentials are map and compass, waterproofs, water and food, warm clothes and sturdy boots. In summer there is nothing wrong with starting out in shorts and T-shirt, but bear in mind you are likely to need an extra layer when you get up into the wind.

Safety

This is fairly common sense. If there is a problem, such as a broken leg, call 999 and ask for Police (they handle rescue call-outs). If you don't have mobile reception leave someone with the injured group member and go for help. If you go out on your own don't break your leg!

Dartmoor

Dartmoor is a region of high moorland. It contains some pockets of primeval oak woodland. The most famous features are the granite tors. The highest being High Willhays at 621m.

The Neolithic activity appears to have been restricted to the edges of the moor. There are many stone circles and a few long cairns.

Dartmoor plays host to vast areas of unspoilt Bronze Age settlements and farms. These range from clusters of huts surrounded by boundary walls and fields to pounds with major stone ramparts. There are numerous stone alignments and circles and hundreds of cairns of all sizes. The longest stone row in the world is in south Dartmoor.

Towards the end of the Bronze Age hillforts began to be built round the edges of the moor. A few Iron Age settlements can be found. The Romans appear to have left the area alone, apart from a few mining operations.

The moor was reclaimed by farmers during the Medieval period. There are several warrens containing scores of pillow mounds. Miners spread across the area looking for tin. A Stannary parliament sprung up to govern the tin miners. The Black Death had an impact on miners and farmers, leaving several deserted villages.

Stalldown Alignment, Cairns and Settlements

Time: 3hrs

From the Harford Moor Gate car park head north along the wall. When this bends left a small path leads on and over the slight crest. Once the gate in the approaching wall appears it is worth leaving the path and walking diagonally up the hill to a pair of cairns.

Cairns

SX 645 603

Bronze Age cairns. Both retain many upright slabs that were originally covered in rocks. The lower one is mostly a slight earth mound. The higher one has an exposed cist at the centre.



Proceed to the gate and enter the enclosure. In amongst the bracken are many stout hut circles with walls of rubble and turf. Many have large upright door posts. There are good views across to the next set of settlements.

Follow the track down until you can turn left and head for the river. A path leads down to this past a hawthorn and rowan tree. Cross the river, hopping from rock to rock, then seek the broad way through the bracken from the terrace beyond. Emerge from the bracken into the Yadsworthy Settlements.

Yadsworthy Settlements

SX 637 612

Large Bronze Age farm settlement. There are many hut circles, most with associated compounds for animals.



From the left hand end of the settlements skirt or pass through the bracken and ascend to the summit.

Hillson's House

SX 636 623

A pair of Bronze Age cairns.



One has a tiny circular hut built on top, using stones from the other. This is named after a mason who took refuge here during the threat of Napoleonic invasion.

Turn left and follow a small path gently downhill.

Stalldown Ring Cairn

SX 634 624

A sizeable ring of rubble, now covered in turf. This was most likely a ritual site associated with the burial mounds as no traces of burial have been found.



Stalldown Stone Row

SX 633 625

A Bronze Age alignment with surprisingly large rocks. At the highest point is a small cairn circle. The 65 stone row points north-south. This is the only alignment on Dartmoor that is located on the top of a hill, though several run over saddles.



Follow a path downwards and northwards. In the distance can be seen a stone circle, visited on another walk. On the hillside to the right are more settlements. You will pass a couple more cairns in various states before reaching a gully. Turn down this and gain the River Erme. Keep to this bank and proceed downstream.

Erme Valley Tin Mining

SX 636 636 etc

Extensive buildings and workings.



The buildings include accommodation huts and blowing houses, where the tin was smelted. Spoil heaps can be found, as well as places where water was directed to erode the soil and expose the ore. In one place on the right there is a good gash where a seam was followed into the hillside.

Tinners have been on Dartmoor from the 12th century to the 16th. Their numbers dropped massively during the Black Death but soon recovered.

On your way down the valley you will reach a dam, with its modern hut. From here a decent trackway runs back to the Yadsworthy Settlements. Just before reaching these it can sometimes be possible to sneak down the hill through bracken to cross the river. If this is done in the right place another trackway can be picked up almost immediately. Follow this, or smaller paths, back through to the enclosure where you first left to cross the river. Retrace your steps to Harford Moor Gate.

This is a free sample from the *Archaeoroutes* range.

Volume 1: North Wales

Volume 2: Dartmoor & Exmoor

Volume 3: Lake District & Yorkshire Dales

Specials: Cotswolds, Quantocks and Orkneys

The walks are also available as geotagged routes which you can follow on your smartphone.

For more information visit:

<http://www.archaeoroutes.co.uk>





ArchaeoRoutes are a range of routes, mostly in wild places, which visit archaeological sites. They include pictures and descriptions of the sites.

Exmoor is an area of high land overlooking the Bristol Channel. It is now mostly heathland but has been being reclaimed for farming for over a century. The highest point is Dunkery Beacon at 519m.

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