

## A GUIDED WALK

### INTRODUCTION

Dartmoor has one of the best preserved prehistoric landscapes in the country. Whilst it may appear bleak and empty now, in the past there were many settlements for farmers and tin workers. The evidence for the lives of these people lies in the walls of their fields and houses, and in the ritual monuments they left behind them. This guide provides a short walk through the Kestor Bronze Age settlement which is situated in the North East area of Dartmoor near the town of Chagford at map reference 665872.

### HOW TO GET THERE

Take the A382 from Whiddon Down in the North or Bovey Tracy in the South. Chagford is signposted from this road. Pass through the small but busy and fashionable town, leaving the church to your left, following a road signposted to Fernworthy Reservoir. After about 1 mile, the road to Fernworthy takes a sharp bend to the left, and you need to take the road to the right signposted to Kestor. The road meanders for about 1.5 miles through the settlement of Teigncombe. The road climbs steeply onto the moor and immediately the road levels off, there is a car park - or at least a space for parking cars - on the right.

### OVERVIEW

This site probably dates from the early Bronze Age and continued in use to the Roman period and beyond. The evidence to support this comes mainly from pottery and pollen and has been dated using C14 dating and typology.

From evidence found, the area appears to have been used for mixed farming consisting probably of arable crops such as wheat and barley. Cattle, pigs and sheep were also reared on this site but due to the high acidity of the soil no bones remain but evidence can be drawn from other sites. Farming was possible because of the climate in the Bronze Age which was warmer than it is today by 2 or 3 degrees C. Also the peat that we find on the moor today had not been laid down to any great depth

From the artefacts found there is evidence to suggest that trade and exchange was carried out in this area. There is evidence of flint on the site, which must have come from a least the Bovey basin a distance of about 15 miles, this being the nearest source. Pottery dating from the middle Bronze Age has been found in large quantities on the site this comes from at least two different areas, the Lizard peninsular in Cornwall and from the Exe valley in Devon.

From the structure of the remains, which consists of houses, field systems and reaves it can be ascertained that there may have been a social organisation of some type. The way that the houses and field systems are laid out it would suggest a communal co-operative was at work. It could also be interpreted as a society dominated by a powerful individual or group of people. The variety in the size of the houses and especially Roundy Pound, which is very large and complex, would suggest that this was the case. Evidence found by archaeologists Aileen Fox and Andrew Fleming would seem to support this theory.

There appears to be a division between the domestic and the ritual as most of the ritual monuments lay outside the field systems.

Reaves were low stonewalls which may have been covered with turf and possibly a fence on top but there is little evidence for this. These reaves separated the fields and usually there was a terminal reave dividing the fields from what appears to be common land. A terminal runs at a right angle to the field systems. Kestor is different in one way because it appears at a later date more field systems were built beyond the original terminal reave.

## THE WALK

1. Start at the cattle grid and walk along the lane towards ROUNDY POUND.

This is one of the largest round houses on the site, which is situated inside a round (ish) pound. The pound itself measures 34m in diameter. It possibly dates from the Bronze Age (2200bc - 800bc) but there is a lot of evidence from the Iron Age (found when excavated in 1953 by Aileen Fox). The house seems to have been divided into two distinct areas - one being a living area and the other a working area. The entrance to the house was stepped and cobbled which is similar to the houses at Grimspound. Within the working area the remains of an iron furnace and slag was found. The iron ore may have come from the Lustleigh area, which is about 12 miles away.

As this house is surrounded by a compound and is the largest one in the settlement it most likely could have been a headman's house.

In the Medieval period the site was used as a shelter by shepherds.

2. Continue along the lane until it makes a sharp turn into Batworthy. Keeping the Batworthy boundary wall to your right, continue ahead across the moor. At Batworthy Corner, the wall makes a right turn. On the left and heading up the slopes are the Shoveldown STONE ROWS.

There are approximately 76 stone rows on Dartmoor. There may be more. Some were identified in the 19th century and have since been lost, some robbed out to build walls, some have possibly disappeared in to the encroaching peat, and some lost in reforestation. Yet others may have been incorrectly identified. After all there is a lot of stone on Dartmoor. On the edge of the Kes Tor Settlement, as it runs into Shovel Down, are 5 possibly 6 stone rows.

Dating of stone rows is very difficult but it is usually suggested that they pre date the Bronze Age settlements that we can see around them. These settlements may hide evidence of earlier settlements that were contemporary with the stone rows.

A suggested date is around 2000 BC but the construction of the rows across Dartmoor may cover 1000 years.

Excavation beneath the stones, were it possible, might help to date the rows but the acidic nature of Dartmoor soil means that there would be little evidence left, even if there had been anything there in the first place. This has generally proved to be the case in the small number of rows where any excavation has been carried out. Any finds have been in the cairns which sometimes end the rows, in this case it has been mostly burnt matter that has been found, charcoal and some bone, suggesting cremations.

The most intriguing question is why were the stone rows built. Even the comparatively small stone rows of this system must have taken many hours of work to erect, suggestive of an important communal effort.

Stone rows and circles are enigmatic. From the finds and the lay out of the roundhouses we can make reasonable assumptions about domestic life in the Bronze Age and relate it to our own, but the stone rows are another matter.

3. Follow the stone rows up the slopes until you reach the end. The tall LONGSTONE should be evident.

The Longstone is located at the end of one of the stone rows where it appears to act as a blocking stone. It is about 3.1 metres high but is not the highest on the moor this is located at Drizzlecombe at 4.5 meters. It probably dates from the same time as the stone rows. These standing stones are often referred to as Menhirs (from Breton men = stone and hir = long). There are a number of such Longstones on Dartmoor another being at Merrivale, which is 3.1 meters high.

The stone is used as a boundary stone marking the parish boundary between Chagford and Gidleigh. According to a story, during the beating of the boundary of Gidleigh parish, a young lad was encouraged stand on his head on top of the Longstone. For this he received the princely sum of 6d.

4. From the Longstone, you can see the craggy outcrop of KESTOR itself. There are a number of small paths that can take you there. The Tor is easy to climb and is a great place to see the whole area.

Kestor Rock dominates the immediate landscape and from the pattern of reaves that run away from the Rock, it was a feature used in the bronze age field systems that lie to the north and west of the rocky tor. Kestor itself has a coarse granite cap with a fine-grained granite pedestal, the latter probably an inclusion of some scale. This fine grained granite is sometimes called blue granite, and in some parts of Dartmoor, such as at Yennadon Down, produces garnets at the interface with the younger coarser grained rock. Another feature on Kestor is a rock basin, some 5 feet across and 3 feet deep. Discovered under peat in 1830, the basin was formed by frost exploiting weaknesses in the grains of the rock to shatter the rock progressively. This is rather more prosaic than the legend of the Dartmoor druid who made the hole for purifying ceremonies and human sacrifice. On first finding, the hole was fenced off to stop sheep falling in, but these have long since been removed, apparently as Dartmoor sheep have become brighter.

There is a splendid view from Kestor. To the north and east, there is the landscape of mid Devon with the Teign valley and Castle Drogo prominent. The Mariners Way runs up the ridge towards Kestor from the northeast; this path was a marked way apparently used by mariners travelling to and from Plymouth in medieval times. But from the lay-out of the reaves that form a continuation of this path, the Mariner's Way itself picked up an existing bronze age route that was probably a drove way. To the west lies the ridge from Cosden Beacon to Hangingstone Tor, while to the south there is the obscenity of Ferworthy plantation, scarring the view towards Hamel Down.

5. Continue along the ridge towards the trees that mark the edge of the common land of the moor in this area. About 250 metres north east of Kestor Rock, these modern fields walls come to a corner. 150 metres due east from this corner, there is

the TEIGNCOMBE ROUNDHOUSE. The house is on private land and is, therefore, inaccessible.

The House, which is currently the subject of an archaeological survey into the damaging effects on antiquities of bracken infestation. This survey was begun in 1999 and has continued every year since; this round house was chosen for invasive study because there are some 5000 examples currently known to exist on Dartmoor alone. In the course of the extensive excavation, a detailed study has also been carried out on the finds of artefacts, including pottery, flints and other materials unearthed. Although precise interpretation and dating of these artefacts is difficult, sherds of pottery have been found possibly dating from the Middle Bronze Age, through the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age, and include some Romano British pieces as well as some from the 14th - 16th century. A number of plastic items, including a yoghurt pot, have been unearthed, recorded and dated. There have also been a number of flints found. Indeed, more artefacts have been found at this round house than any other single place on Dartmoor and this presents the fascinating possibility that the house might have been in use from Stone Age through to medieval times, with even evidence of some more modern usage. Also during the excavations, a number of quartz crystals have been found. There is much speculation over these crystals, with suggestions ranging from them being used as toys by children to having some artistic or religious significance to the house occupants, or, more prosaically, washed down from higher rocky layers of granite.

The house is not quite visible from the wall, but a stone circle in the field above it is very clear. This is, in fact, a modern circle built by the current landowners, and not an ancient monument.

6. With the field wall to your right, continue down the slopes a little until you find a long narrow trench in the ground. This is likely to be a medieval leat, a way of transporting water across the moor. By following the leat you come to the best example of a small bronze age farmstead in the Kestor settlement. This consists of the remains of a series of Bronze Age round houses, field systems and reaves. Jeremy Butler has numbered these houses in his series of books titled the Dartmoor Atlas of Antiquities. House 14 also known by local archaeologists as the 'Bike Shed' is the first house that you encounter. It is one of the largest, being approximately 8.9 metres in diameter with the remaining walls being constructed of large granite slabs. There are two smaller ruined houses next to this house. Also joined to it by a ruined wall is a small squared walled enclosure, which is unusual for the Bronze Age, and as yet its use has not been discovered.

To the East across a drove way and surrounded by gorse is another ruined house (15), being smaller at only 5.8 metres in width.

To the North, again crossing the drove way is another very impressive house (13), also known as the 'Swimming Pool' due to the fact that there is always water in it. This house, 8.4 metres in diameter, has an exceptionally thick wall up to 3.5 metres across with the complete remains of its inner facing massive granite slabs surviving.

Further North is the remains of house 11 with a diameter of 9.1 metres, the walls of which have been incorporated into present day field enclosure walls.

Some of the smaller structures may have been used as workshops, and it appears that each house has its own couple of fields associated with it. Between the houses is a deep lane or droveway. This dates from the time of the settlement but leads down the slopes to the green lane that forms part of Mariners Way.

7. Climb back to the top of the ridge and then back down to the car at the cattle grid. As you walk, you may notice many other reaves and houses. The whole of these slopes are covered with settlement evidence.

THIS GUIDE was written collaboratively by students studying Dartmoor Archaeology at Queen Elizabeth's Community College, Crediton

## Bibliography

Butler, J 1991 Dartmoor Atlas of Antiquities Vol 2. Devon Books

Butler, J 1997 Dartmoor Atlas of Antiquities Vol 5. Devon Books

Crossing, W 1905 Echoes of an Ancient Forest

Fleming, A 1988 The Dartmoor Reaves: Investigating Prehistoric Land Divisions. Batsford

Fox, A 1953 "Excavations at Kestor" in Devon Association Transactions Vol 86

Gerrard, S 1997 Dartmoor. Batsford

Gerrard, S 1999 Interim Report Dartmoor Archaeology and Bracken Project

Gerrard, S 2000 Interim Report Dartmoor Archaeology and Bracken Project

Gerrard, S 2002 Interim Report Dartmoor Archaeology and Bracken Project

Gerrard, S 2003 Interim Report Dartmoor Archaeology and Bracken Project

Griffiths, D (ed) 1996 The Archaeology of Dartmoor. Devon Archaeological Society

Handsford Worth, R 1953 Worth's Dartmoor 1994 Edition

Pettit, P 1974 Prehistoci Dartmoor. David and Charles