

## Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> August - Ten Tors the Easy Way with David Buss

After 24 hours of continuous heavy rain the previous day, and with even more forecast for today, we set off for Haytor in apprehensive mood. Would mud 'n flood force us to modify our ambition to climb Ten Tors be reduced to just a half-dozen tors or, worse, a mere pair of the granite jewels for which Dartmoor is renowned? The staff at the Visitors' Centre assured us that they were not aware of any problems, so we five plucky OVA-ers set off in hopeful mood for which we were to be rewarded with five hours of glorious panoramic views across Dartmoor and the surrounding areas and a most enjoyable moorland perambulation.

Having made the brief but bracing ascent to Haytor, we bagged our first tor in less than 10



minutes with John enthusiastically climbing to the very top. Haytor is Devon's most visited tor, not least because of its proximity to a couple of car parks and an ice cream van. It's not the highest on Dartmoor, or even on this walk, but it's visible from many places around the

county and beyond, and has provided a useful bearing for travellers and workers for centuries.

A steep descent a gentle climb and we bagged our second tor, the aptly-named Saddle Tor



from where we looked back to a very different view of Haytor lying Sphinx-like to our east.

Following our third bagging - Pil Tor - we headed north for a short level walk that brought us to Top Tor where it was unanimously agreed that it was time for our coffee break.



For much of this walk, navigation was hardly challenging as the next tor was usually visible before we left the previous one, and the smooth grassy pathways were clearly visible as they meandered through the lush green bracken. Continuing in our northerly directions, we bagged Bell Tor, Chinkwell Tor (at 458 metres, the highest of our ten tors) and Honey Bag Tor where we were joined by one of the locals for lunch.



From here, easily identifiable landmarks included Widecombe Church, the North Hessary Tor mast near Princeton, Halden Belvedere, and the white cube-like object which Castle Drogo has become for the duration of its protracted restoration.

7 out of the 10 tors bagged, but only half the ten-mile circuit completed. Heading back south, we contoured round the eastern side of Chinkwell Tor to avoid the mire, then we headed due east to reach Holwell Lawn, famous for its arrays of bluebells in May but coated in bracken in August. A permissive footpath took us between a variety of horse jumping fences, before we turned northwards again to the most northerly part of our walk, Hound Tor. A very short stroll took us past the Medieval Village, which was excavated as recently as the early 1960s, and our penultimate tor, the impressive Greater. A steep descent brought us to the stone clapper bridge over Becka Brook, probably the prettiest location on this walk.



Deep breaths, then we took on the steepest climb of the day to get to Smallacombe Rocks where we looked back across the valley to see several of the tors already bagged.

The route to our final tor, Holwell Tor, brought us to the famous granite railway which we followed to its destination at the quarry, active from 1820 to 1919, that provided granite stone for buildings including The British Museum and the Exeter War Memorial.

Having bagged our target of Ten Tors, we returned to the granite railway which we followed to the entrance to the Haytor Quarries, now a beautiful oasis in the surrounding moorland with its pools, plant life and rock outcrops and, on this occasion, a magnificent display of waterlilies.



Following the gentle descent back to the car park, we finished off a great day with a visit to Moorlands, the nearby HF Holidays Hotel, to enjoy well-earned cream teas in their Tin Pickle and Rhum Café.

David Buss