



## Dartmoor

### Bonehill Down – Honeybag Tor

It was a real pea-souper. The clouds had descended upon central Dartmoor like some giant meteorological eiderdown and walkers couldn't see past the ends of their dampened noses.

We peered at the map and decided we'd find some safe-ish corner in which we'd try to follow our dampened noses. The challenge: to complete a circular route on the map around a few invisible tors and return unscathed. Not a terrible proposition – IF we had a compass. Without one, it was daft - but, I thought, do-able.

So we went to the ridge above Widecombe-in-the-Moor where there is a place called Bonehill Down. In my case it would have been better named Boneheaded Down for all the luck I had on my blind traverse to the north.

I chose the walk over Bell Tor, Chinkwell Tor and around Honeybag Tor because it is surrounded by features which, even in a thick fog, should see you safely back to your car. And, although we did return safely without too much mucking about in the murk, we somehow entirely failed to make contact with the two latter rock-stacks.

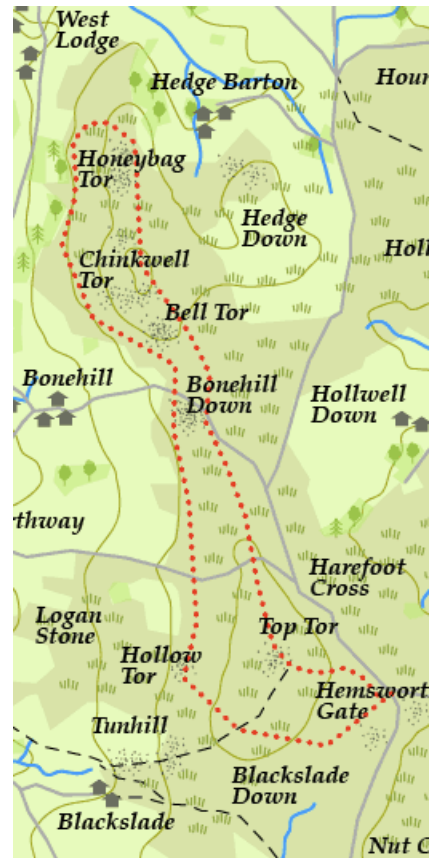
Which goes to show that the simple old fashioned compass isn't a bad thing. Compasses are cheap and they work. From now on, I'm keeping mine handy in the glove-box just in case – though you may, sensibly, suggest that a walks writer should do such a thing as a matter of course.

Who knows, I may even splash out one day and go in for one of those global positioning satellite devices. My brother has one that links to a tiny palm-held computer – it's unbelievable: it shows a detailed map, places him to the exact spot within a couple of metres and tells him in which direction he's walking...

As it was, not even Ordnance Survey's detailed Outdoor Leisure map could help us in the gloom. It is surprising how even the most fully featured of terrains can suddenly become utterly featureless in a fog.

But, not to be entirely beaten, I returned to the area on a better day because I knew the walk (somewhat ironically in the circumstances) boasted the most fabulous views.

On this occasion I added to the route by parking at Hemsworthy Gate, on the junction of the Haytor and Ashburton roads as they join in their bid to reach Widecombe, so that



*Basic hike: from Hemsworthy Gate (at junction of Ashburton and Haytor roads where they meet on their way to Widecombe) across Top Tor, north over Bonehill Down to eventually reach Honeybag Tor – returning along the lower contours back to Bonehill Down continuing south to Hollow Tor and Foale's Arrishes.*

*Recommended map: Ordnance Survey OL 28 Dartmoor.*

*Distance and going: five to six miles – easy going.*

I could take the gentle stroll up to 432 metre Top Tor and enjoy the rolling views which stretch right across the South Hams.

From Top Tor I then walked due north, descending to cross the Widecombe road so that I could make from Bonehill Rocks. This is as splendid a little knot of granite as you'll find anywhere on the moors and is, not surprisingly, pretty popular given the close vicinity of several small car parks.

As I've already alluded, we are on the big north-south ridge which rises to the east of Widecombe and which guards its beautiful moorland vale from the higher land of Dartmoor's main south-easterly bastion centred on Haytor.

From Bonehill Rocks I descended just a little bit to the north west (crossing the Bonehill lane), avoided a bog and ascended Bell Tor – which is quite a bit bigger and taller than it looks on the map. From there it was north-west again to Chinkwell Tor.

Photographers wishing to snap first-class views of famous Widecombe-in-the-Moor could do worse than ascend this pile. You get a wondrous aerial angle that allows you to look straight down the valley where the East Weburn River is making its way south to join its sister stream.

When looking at the vale from hereabouts, I can't help but ponder a local anecdote the old WMN walks writer William Crossing noted 100 years ago. He mentions how a landowner, who wasn't seen in the vale much, came across an old dame while on a stroll not far from Chinkwell Tor.

"Desirous of learning what kind of reputation he had as a landlord, he asked her what kind of man Mr Blank was: 'Can't tell 'e sir,' replied the woman. 'Never see 'n as I know by. But us do cal'n ole darnin' needle'."

I can only assume this was in reference to the man's largesse – or lack of it – though if readers know different I should like to hear their thoughts.

From the high rocks of Chinkwell Tor, it's north again down over the saddle and up to Honeybag Tor. Here the walker is treated to magnificent views stretching past North Bovey and Moretonhampstead into the vastness of central Devon.

In fact, when I come to think of it, this is just about the only short walk of five miles or so on Dartmoor that offers vistas both north and south of the great massif.

Honeybag Tor marks the end of the aforementioned ridge and you have a number of options as far as the return route is concerned. I retraced my steps down into the dip of the saddle where a huge man-made rut slices the hill. It is in this rut that you will find the small pond the map refers to as Shades Well. I have to be honest and say that I cannot find any references as to what the earthwork is all about, but imagine it is either linked with tin-streaming or, alternatively, may be some ancient rampart designed to defend the heights back in prehistoric times.

A green path runs west down the edge of the rut into the vale, and this I followed until I gained the woodlands that lurk above the Widecombe-North Bovey lane. Here, on the upper edge of the woods, a broad stone track follows the contours

south under Chinkwell Tor, eventually climbing just above the fields to regain Bonehill Down and its celebrated rocks.

From there I continued due south along the contours, re-crossing the main Widcombe-Haytor road to reach the Shovel Stone. Then I followed a southerly arc around Top Tor - taking in Hollow Tor, Pil Tor and Foale's Arrishes - before eventually regaining my car. The two hour walk had given me some of the very best views available on Dartmoor - in a place where, a month previously, I hadn't been able to see past the end of my nose.