



Dartmoor

Chagford Common and Shovel Down



Dartmoor is rich in remains of the ancient world and Chagford Common and Shovel Down must have been the Stone Age equivalent of Piccadilly Circus. Today it is a remote place. Gaining access to the area is somewhat problematic because of the twin rivers Teign. They surround this high northerly spur of the hill – the Little Teign ducks and delves in a great ravine to the south, while its sister the North Teign cuts a big arc between Chagford Common and Scorhill Down.

The roads west of Chagford are tortuous to say the least. To reach the venue for this hike you must take the Manor Road out of the old Stannery Town and proceed to a hamlet called Thorn. Go onto a place called Yeo and then climb the hill past the farm at Frenchbeer.

Frenchbeer Rock is the name of the first port of call on this hike, and you'll see it sitting a few hundred yards above the lane just as it enters the moor. You can park on the greensward and, after leaving your car, it's simply a matter of heading for the rocky eminence to enjoy the first panoramic view.

Having climbed the rock, you will see vast vistas of the northern eastern flanks of the moor. And you will see Chagford Common – not the Chagford Common we're about to walk over – the other one above Fernworthy Reservoir.

Walking north west again we reach Middle Tor in just quarter of a mile. It's got a hole in it - so has Kester Rock which we can see if we look straight ahead. This is the crowning glory of the northerly Chagford Common. There is a circular basin that appears to have been cut into the granite. It's only about three or four feet across and two or three feet deep, but it is a curious thing to find. Did someone cut it? If so why, and how?

Basic Hike: along the northerly Chagford Common to Kester Rock, down to follow the North Teign upriver into the moors returning via Shovel Down.

Recommended map: Ordnance Survey OL 28 Dartmoor.

Distance and going – four miles - easygoing, no steep sections but could be boggy in winter.

Or is it the result of some long-gone harder boulder rattling about on slightly softer rock for several thousand years?

A mystery, but this area is loaded with antediluvian riddles. Look at the map and you'll see mention of numerous hut circles and settlements. But there's more besides, and the next part of our walk will introduce us to some of Dartmoor's more dramatic prehistoric remains.

After enjoying the breathtaking views of the whole of central Devon, we walk downhill from Kestor Rock in a westerly direction to reach a place called Butworthy Corner. This is just a low depression a mile or so above the North Teign – a mile or so above the Teign-e-ver clapper bridge.

Next we walked into the zone which the Ordnance Survey map marks as Danger Area (military ranges) and re-crossed the stream at the point where Hugh Lake brook enters from the north.

From there we climbed Stonetor Hill which rises to the east and then crossed to Shovel Down - the low summit of which is another mile or so further on. From here you can look down at the remarkable stone rows for which this lonely eminence is famous.

These particular rows are of the parallel variety – the two rows run alongside each other, three or four feet apart. Why go to all the bother of hauling big rocks from the surrounding hills and arranging them so neatly and uniformly in the anarchic wilds of nature?

And why stand the vast rock called the Three Boys on its end? It's the huge and impressive standing stone which lies at the southern extremity of the stone rows. Clueless as to what the ancient folk were about, we marched around the northerly flanks of Thornworthy Tor to return to our car puzzled, but all the happier for having visited one of Dartmoor's most scenic tablelands.