



## North Dartmoor

### Crockern Tor and Beyond

Parliament seems to be becoming an increasingly irrelevant place nowadays as more and more executive power is wielded by the incumbent at Number 10 Downing Street - and, gazing at a rock on the top of Dartmoor the other day, I got to thinking about power, and seats thereof.

There was good reason for what might have seemed a bout of madness in the wilderness, the rock which I surveyed used to be the seat of very great power - the people who held the roost here used to control just about all of Dartmoor.

I was on Crockern Tor, just north of Two Bridges, and this lonesome windswept pile of rocks was once the place where the all-powerful tinnerns ran their Stannery. Indeed, it was the place where the whole power-base of the tinnerns eventually came to an end.

More of that in a moment, but first let's find Crockern Tor and describe the basic walk which can be enjoyed around its airy heaths. If you travel a mile north east of Two Bridges on the Moretonhampstead road you'll pass Parson's Cottage before reaching the award winning Cherrybrook Hotel. If you go through the gate immediately after the cottage you will see a scattered pile of rocks hanging directly above you to the north.

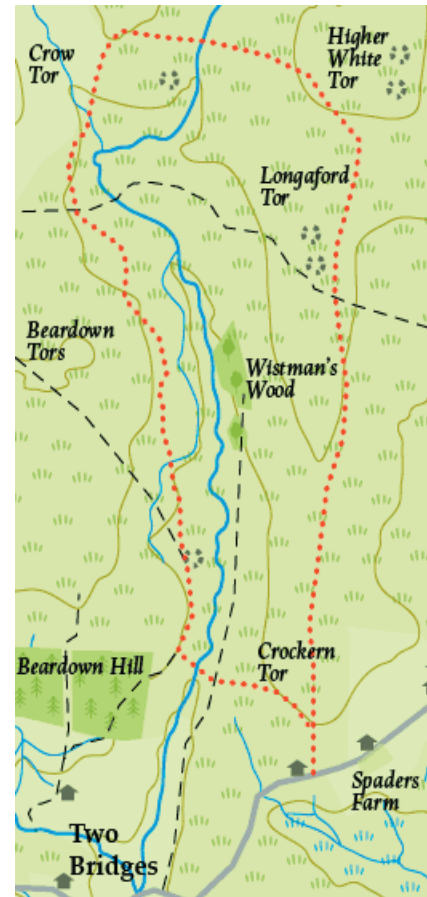
The OS map describes it thus: «Crockern Tor Meeting Place of the Stannery Parliament.»

Walk the third of a mile up from the road today, and you will find no sign whatsoever of all this power-wielding. But you will, to the south and east, be treated to the most extensive and dramatic views of the central heartlands of the Dartmoor plateau.

Beyond, to the north, lies nothing but wilderness - which is as good a place as any to take an afternoon stroll. We'll be doing just that, but let's get the story of the Crockern out of the way first.

Not surprisingly, the WMN's old Dartmoor writer William Crossing is able to inform us all about it. Most people will know that the tinnerns of Dartmoor had their own parliament called a Stannery, and that they could more or less do what they liked in terms of enforcing law and order.

Back in the reign of Henry VIII the MP for Plymton was one William Strode, and he was a most unpopular fellow with the tinnerns having persuaded the central government in London



*Basic hike: over Crockern Tor (just north of Two Bridges) north to Higher White Tor then down to headwaters of the West Dart which we follow south to regain the flanks of Crockern.*

*Recommended map: Ordnance Survey OL 28.*

*Distance and going: five miles, can be damp under foot in places.*

to pass a Bill which would effectively stop them from silting the streams running off the moor.

Tinners, it has to be said, were no better than vandals when it came to clogging up streams and watercourses. It was central to their way of extracting tin, so you can imagine they were pretty fed up with Strode and summoned him to appear before them at Crockern Tor. He refused, was fined in his absence, and dragged off to Lydford Castle where he was locked in a dungeon.

«He had to give a bond for £100 (a huge sum back then) to Thomas Denys, deputy-warden to the Stannaries, to obtain his release and an Act was then passed making his condemnation by the tinners utterly void,» writes Crossing.

«The supremacy of the Imperial Parliament was thus asserted, and from that time the power of the tinners gradually declined.»

The tinners carried on holding their own parliament at Crockern Tor, even though power had filtered through their fingers like sand in a stream, but eventually they got fed up with this fairly meaningless pursuit and would open Court on the tor, only to adjourn matters until they could be discussed in far more comfortable Tavistock.

All this history in one modest pile of rocks. Hard to imagine when you're up on Crockern taking in the view, but thought provoking nonetheless.

We walked due north of the Crockern across the great downs above Wistman's Wood, and eventually ascended Longaford Tor and then proceed slightly north-east to Higher White Tor. Now the great vale of the East Dart had opened up before us and we were able to gaze across at Bellever Tor and around to Postbridge and the northern moors.

In order to make a circuit of the stroll we descended due west of the tor into the West Dart valley, making our way around the lower clutter of rocky Crow Tor to reach a place called Foxholes. Crow, by the way, is pronounced to rhyme with «now» - not that it mattered, there were no crows there, or anything else, just like there were no foxes at Foxholes.

There were, however, the red warning flags of the military range which meant we could proceed no further in our bid to reach the Beardown Man - a famous and mighty standing stone situated on the flanks of Devil's Tor.

More about him another time when this site gets around to exploring the wild environs of Fur Tor, which must be the remotest place in the Westcountry.

This time though, it was a matter of heading back south under Beardown Tors. This is easy walking because all you have to do is find marvellous Devonport Leat and follow its path-like banks. Like some parkland pleasure trail, this takes you through the boulder clutter with great ease until you reach a point due west of Crockern Tor.

Then it's simply a matter of descending a few feet to the West Dart, finding a place to boulder-hop across, and then

climbing the ancient seat of parliament to regain your car on the other side.

This is an excellent and highly convenient Dartmoor hike that boasts the sifting sands of history as part of the tour.