



## Dartmoor

### Hexworthy



*Basic hike: from Hexworthy west across the Swincombe Valley and north past the Dartmoor Training Centre to the Princetown road – back via Cherry Brook and Dunnabridge Pound, taking in the new access land on the banks of the Dart and the Swincombe River*

*Recommended map: Ordnance Survey's new Explorer OL28 showing the new public access areas of Dartmoor.*

*Distance and going: five miles, could be muddy in wet weather.*

The government's right to roam legislation has now been in force in the Westcountry for a couple of years, opening numerous large tracts of land for public access where they'd been closed before.

Ordnance Survey has published maps to celebrate the opening of the moors - not only do they depict every single public right of way, but they inform us of vast new swathes of the landscape where we are "free to roam".

Dartmoor National Park was pretty much opened up to walkers anyway, but there were places where you really didn't know for sure whether you were welcome or not. Several such areas existed around the remote village of Hexworthy, which is a fine base for a day's hiking if ever there was one.

If you study Ordnance Survey's previous Dartmoor Explorer OL28 map, then compare it to the latest one, you will see that the public access areas in the vicinity have grown considerably, especially along the banks of the Dart both to the north and to the west of the village – with walkable terrain now open almost all the way to Princetown.

The land south of the village has also been opened up with a spur heading down the east side of Clay Brake almost all

the way to Dartmeet. Earlier this week I managed to compete a large circular walk through much of this newly opened land by parking close to Hexworthy's pub and walking south towards Down Ridge.

Turning west I trekked along the lane to join the Dartmoor Way which continues around a shoulder of hill down to meet the River Swincombe. There are some interesting looking ruins close to the river in this shallow valley, and when visiting the area I asked long term Hexworthy resident, Diana Croaker, if she knew anything about them.

She told me: "John Bishop's house – that's what we've always called it. I remember people living there. An old man and his daughter. And, in the snow once, I had to fetch them supplies by riding over to Princetown. I remember they'd got the prisoners out clearing the roads when I got over there.

"On the way back a bag of sugar burst and went all over the big joint of lamb I was bringing back for them," recalled Diana. "They never said anything, but I can't help but feel that must have been very sweet lamb."

I followed what must have been Diana's route towards Princetown by continuing due west along the Dartmoor Way path, making my way up the hill back into public access land. By using my new Explorer OL20, I found my way north over the common to the West Dart River at the Dartmoor Training Centre, crossed the water and continued up the public right of way past the Prince Hall Hotel to yet another wedge of access land.

This took me to the main Princetown road which I crossed to gain an area marked on the map as a massive swathe of creamy yellow. Now it was due east, over the Cherry Brook, and on past Dunnabridge Pound Farm to the place beyond the ancient pound where I could see that there was a footpath just south of the road.

I could have crossed before and made my way down a big new block of access land to Dunnabridge Plantation - under which walkers enjoy a newly found access to the shores of the West Dart. The trouble would have been that I'd have been required to get my feet wet in order to continue – as the only legal way out would have been to cross the river.

As it was, I followed the public path south down the contours to a place called Downberry where I entered yet another newly opened zone. This slice extends more than a mile along the north bank of the West Dart, but once again would have led me down a cul-de-sac.

So I continued to the stepping stones at the junction where the River Swincombe joins the Dart, and these allowed me to continue up the east bank of the former stream to meet the lane that leads back over to Hexworthy.

If all this sounds a little convoluted, the circular route will soon become obvious after a quick glance at the map. Nine tenths of the five miles walked lies within the boundaries of the new access land and the final tenth is walked on public footpaths. So, although there are better and more obvious hi-

kes to be had on Dartmoor, it does allow you the opportunity to go home brimming with a sense of achievement.

I'd walked – with full legal entitlement – through areas which have officially been closed to the public for the best part of a thousand years.