

Dartmoor, UK

www.allwaystraveller.com

Dramatic landscapes and stunning sunsets on Dartmoor

Dartmoor, in the English County of Devon covers some 360 square miles and is an area of truly dramatic landscapes.

It is the largest area of open country in the south of England.

The 'danger' areas in the northern, more desolate, part of Dartmoor are used at agreed times by the British army as a firing range.

This part comprises large areas of wild, rugged, open moorland, punctuated with granite tors.

When not 'commandeered' by the military it is a magnet for the intrepid hiker or mountain cyclist whose ability with a map and compass negates the need for footpaths, tarmac or direction signs.

The southern part of the moor is an altogether more welcoming environment with hills and dales cut through by ancient wooded valleys and fast flowing streams and rivers, alive with dippers and kingfisher.

Together, they offer a place for those attracted to the great outdoors, whatever the season - and whatever the weather, which can change from day to day.

Ashley Gibbins
Managing editor
AllWays traveller



www.markgeorgephotography.co.uk



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A personal view of Dartmoor



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Onto the moor – at long, long last

By Ashley Gibbins

Growing up in the predominantly rural English county of Somerset, my first recollection of staying away from home was as a ten year old and on a 'boys brigade' camping weekend in the Quantock Hills.

This officially designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, just twelve miles by four, is one of country lanes passing between rolling meadows and hillsides that slope casually to the Bristol Channel.

While this was an undeniably gentle introduction to the pleasures of the English countryside, it none the less instilled in me a passion for the outdoors - particularly when linked with nights under canvass.

The next step up

Having been tempted by the Quantocks, the natural next area of expedition was the neighbouring Exmoor National Park.

Straddling the West Somerset/North Devon border, and 'weighing in' at 267.5 sq miles across this was a real step up for this young adventurer.

During my early teens I spent many happy school holidays on back packing explorations of Exmoor and so began a life long love of its rolling moorland, deep valleys and towering cliffs along its coastal border.

With the Exmoor ponies and wild red deer roaming free and the chance to go, off road, for long periods without meeting anyone, I thrived on the real sense of the wild (confident that 'civilisation' was never that far away).

Exmoor's big brother

But Dartmoor, home to Conan Doyle's *Hound of the Baskervilles*, at 368 sq miles, was far more daunting.

We all knew (albeit incorrectly) that Dartmoor Prison held only the most dangerous criminals who were there because it was just impossible escape across the moors.

This was indeed the ultimate challenge to this young adventurer.

I never did get to camp on Dartmoor. Rugby, girls and a slowly burgeoning career all got in the way.

But now, and after more years later than I care to recall, I have been able to tick Dartmoor off my list - albeit on a visit that did not involve a constantly flapping tent and waking at dawn bleary eyed and aching.

While on Dartmoor



www.dartmoor.gov.uk

Dartmoor National Park



www.dartmoor.gov.uk

The Dartmoor National Park, the fourth UK National Park, was designated in 1951.

The dramatic granite outcrops or 'tors', which dominate the skyline in many places on the moor are all that remains of once giant mountains, eroded and frost shattered over millions of years.

Dartmoor is also one of the most important Bronze Age landscapes in Western Europe, containing thousands of hut circles, the remains of human habitation, stone rows, standing stones, religious complexes and burial sites.

The National Park contains habitats of national and international importance and supports a diverse range of bird, animal and plant species.

Dartmoor ponies play an important part in habitat management by grazing plants that cattle and sheep won't eat.

An area of true contrast there are large swathes of purple, heather clad moorland, interspersed with rushing rivers that can only really be enjoyed on foot and with a map and compass.

But Dartmoor also offers many more accessible areas, with rolling valleys, waterfalls and well signposted moorland paths and woodland walks.

www.dartmoor.gov.uk

Dartmoor was well worth the wait



www.markgeorgephotography.co.uk

During our short break on Dartmoor we, unfortunately, did not have time to explore the 'so called' danger areas.

We did, however, enjoy three wonderful days that brought home what I had been missing these years.

The grand tour



www.markgeorgephotography.co.uk

For the first full day on Dartmoor we decided to take, what might be described as, the grand tour that took in Princetown, Two Bridges, Postbridge, Widecombe-in-the-Moor and Dartmeet.

Princetown

Princetown is a good place to start any tour of Dartmoor - if for no other reason than the excellent tourist information Centre in the village, with its incredibly helpful staff.

Thirty minutes here and the two ladies we met sorted out our whole stay on the moor, including the most scenic way off it on the last day.

In high season, Princetown is a bustling crossroads for hikers and cyclists and drop off for coach loads of day trippers.

In addition to the cafes and stores, Princetown has its own brewery producing a range of real ales including the appropriately named, and suitably robust Jail Ale.

This can be supped in the village's two pubs and at inns throughout the moor.

HM Prison Dartmoor

Princetown is also 'home' to the aforementioned Her Majesty's Prison Dartmoor, an imposing Category C men's prison (for those who cannot be trusted in open conditions but who are unlikely to try to escape), which debunks that myth of my youth.

Built between 1806 and 1809, to hold prisoners of the Napoleonic Wars, it has confined wrongdoers ever since.

The prison museum

The Dartmoor Prison Museum, in the old dairy, focuses on the history of HMP Dartmoor, and has exhibits highlighting the prison's role with displays including manacles, weapons, memorabilia, clothing and uniforms.

There are sections on famous prisoners and less well known aspects such as the incarceration of conscientious objectors during World War One.

www.Dartmoor-prison.co.uk

Military training

Dartmoor has been used for military training since the early 1800s and the UK's Ministry of Defence has a training area on northern part of the moor.

The public enjoys access to these moorland areas, except when the ranges are in use for live firing.

Dartmoor ponies



www.dartmoor.gov.uk

Hoof prints from Dartmoor ponies, which were found during archaeological digs, reveal these animals were around some 3,500 years ago, with written records of their presence here dating from AD1012.

Over the centuries the ponies have been used as working horses, transporting granite from the moorland quarries, for riding and driving, as pit ponies, taking produce to market and carrying the postman delivering his mail.

As these uses became unnecessary, their numbers have dwindled so that today, there are some 1500 ponies roaming wild, with far fewer pedigree Dartmoor Ponies.

That said, it is still a real pleasure to see the ponies grazing peacefully over the moor, be they pure Dartmoor, Shetland or other breeds.

All are hardy animals well able to thrive on Dartmoor despite the harsh weather and poor vegetation.

By grazing the moor, they play a vital role in maintaining a variety of habitats and supporting a range of other wildlife.

www.dartmoorcommonerscouncil.org.uk



Wistman's Wood : www.markgeorgephotography.co.uk

Two bridges – and a pint of Jail Ale

A couple of miles on from Princetown is Two Bridges, which gets its name from, well, the two bridges that cross the West Dart River here.

One is part of the old turnpike road built across Dartmoor in the late 18th century, with the other the less exciting B3357.

The area here is surrounded by Bronze Age settlements, stone row walls and the intriguingly named Wistman's Wood.

Wistman's Wood

A none to strenuous, one-mile, walk from Two Bridges gets one to Wistman's Wood, an area of ancient oak woodland growing among granite boulders.

Back in 1797 a Reverend Swete felt compelled to write that "It is hardly possible to conceive anything of the sort so grotesque as this wood appears".

He was referring to the woods large clump of stunted oak trees with twisted, gnarled and intertwining branches.

These can be spotted quite a way off and adds real encouragement to completing the walk to it.

The oaks with their tangled branches, and the uneven rocky floor, make it impossible for Dartmoor ponies and cattle to graze.

As a result there is also more than 100 different species of lichen found in the Wood.

The Two Bridges Hotel

Back from the walk and it was straight into the Two Bridges Hotel, an old 18th Century coaching inn that is as welcoming as one could hope to find.

It may have been the thirst acquired by the walk, but my Jail Ale, sipped from a comfortable Queen Ann chair in the hotel's lounge, was as nice a pint as I have tasted in a long time.

www.twobridges.co.uk

Widecombe-in-the-Moor

Widecombe-in-the-Moor, one of Dartmoor's prime tourist hubs, is an attractive village offering cafes, gift shops and two pubs (the Old Inn and the Rugglestone).

The village lies in a valley created by the East Webbern river, with its name deriving from 'Withy-combe' meaning 'Willow Valley'.

It is perhaps best known for its annual fair made 'famous' as the destination for a group of lads called Bill Brewer, Jan Stewer, Peter Gurney, Peter Davy, Dan'l Whiddon, Harry Hawke - and 'old Uncle Tom Cobley and all', in the traditional English folk song.

www.widecombe-in-the-moor.com

The National Trust, Dartmoor



The National Trust owns and manages some of Dartmoor's most beautiful river valleys.

In addition to Buckland a Abbey and Lydford Gorge, Castle Drogo, the last castle to be built in England and currently undergoing a five year restoration programme.

Finch Foundry, a working forge powered by water that produced up to 400 tools a day in its heyday, is located in the moorland village of Sticklepath.

The last remaining working 19th-century water-powered forge in England, it has demonstrations of the machinery every hour.

Sexton's Cottage in Widecombe-in-the-Moor showcases local artists and craftspeople with its gallery on the 1st floor plus information about visiting the moor.

As well as its buildings the Trust manages many outdoor spaces with well signposted gentle ambles possible along the Teign, Bovey and Plym rivers and more demanding walks across the open moorland from Cadover Bridge in the upper Plym area.

Fingle Bridge is a picturesque spot with its Packhorse Bridge and riverside meadows in the shadow of the wooded hillsides of the Teign Gorge.

www.nationaltrust.org

Dartmoor Walking Festival

The Dartmoor Walking Festival (Saturday 27 August to Sunday 4 September 2016) will have several events each day ranging from modest guided strolls and children's rambles to full day walks and ambitious challenges!

It is set to become an annual event.

www.moorlandguides.co.uk/dwf

The Clapper Bridge at Postbridge



The Clapper Bridge : www.markgeorgephotography.co.uk

Postbridge, which is no more than a short string of homes with a shop and pub, is bang in the middle of Dartmoor and, therefore, a start and finish point for ramblers.

It also has the finest example of a 'clapper' bridge in the county, which straddles the East Dart River.

Clapper bridges, which are unique to Dartmoor, were built during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries by medieval tin workers and farmers as crossings over the many small rivers that flow on the moorland.

They are constructed from four large granite slabs supported by three granite piers and there are still some 30 clapper bridges to be found on Dartmoor.

For those not looking to hike for miles there are more gentle footpaths up onto the moorland.

Dartmeet

Our grand tour ended, perhaps appropriately, at Dartmeet.

Genuinely impressive, and an inevitable tourist hotspot during the summer months, it is where east and west branches of the River Dart meet in a steep, wooded valley.

Another fine example of a stone clapper bridge is to be found here.

Another popular stop here is the Pixieland and Brimpts Farm, the home of the Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust, and the Badgers Holt tea rooms with its goats, peacocks and tearoom.

A stroll around the lake

On day two of our visit we opted for a morning stroll around Burrator Reservoir followed by a visit to Buckland Abbey.

Burrator Reservoir

The 19th and 20th centuries saw several reservoirs built on Dartmoor to capture the rainwater that supplied the towns surrounding the moor.

With the establishment of the Dartmoor National Park in 1951, these have been developed for leisure and recreation.

Burrator Reservoir is a fine example of this offering a large stretch of water, surrounded by mixed woodland with open moor and rugged Dartmoor tors providing a backdrop.

There are a number of footpaths and bridleways which provide for a 3.5 mile walking round trip or as starting points for longer treks into Dartmoor itself.

We opted for the inner footpath which follows the edge of the reservoir, passing through mainly wooded areas with the chance to view the water all the way round.

Other places to consider



www.markgeorgephotography.co.uk

Hound Tor

The clump of boulders that is Hound Tor offers one of the most easily accessible and impressive views of Dartmoor.

An easy half mile walk from the car park, Hound Tor is said to have inspired Arthur Conan Doyle to put pen to paper and create The Hound of the Baskervilles.

Dunsford Woods

For a classic Dartmoor walk try Dunsford Woods (between Dunsford and Moretonhampstead), which meanders along the banks of the River Teign through oak woodland.

In early spring the nature reserve comes into bloom as the yellow, trumpet-shaped heads of wild daffodils fill in the gaps between the trees.

Throughout the year salmon and brown trout use the river to travel to their spawning grounds upstream, while otters and goosander come here to hunt them.

Dart Valley Nature Reserve

The Dart Valley nature reserve allow visitors to discover the wildest side of Dartmoor. The paths here are narrow and the going can get tough but a little effort brings wild rewards.

www.devonwildlifetrust.org

Ashburton

Referred to as the gateway to the moor, this elegant town was founded on the mining and clothing industries and was one of four 'stannary' towns where tin was brought to be taxed.

Fine buildings remain, and now house a collection of antique stores, cafés and restaurants.

www.ashburton.org



Buckland Abbey

Those who know us know we always look to support the National Trust, while on UK trips, and will always seek out its properties.



On this visit to Dartmoor it was Buckland Abbey a 700-year-old, one time, Cistercian Abbey founded in 1278.

Following the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII, in 1541, the property was occupied by Sir Richard Grenville the Elder (Sewer of the Chamber to Henry VIII).

It was also home to English naval commander, Sir Francis Drake, and 'Drake's Drum' forms a centerpiece of the museum - along with a Rembrandt self-portrait valued at £30 million.

The Great Barn has remained virtually unchanged since it was built all those centuries ago and the gardens and surrounding meadows offer relaxing strolls and views of the Tavy Valley.

As with all National Trust properties, Buckland Abbey provides for a fascinating and very enjoyable visit.

My first trip to Dartmoor, after all these years, will not be my last - even if my backpacking days are long gone.

Leaving the moor

We left Dartmoor, on our last day via Lydford Gorge.

Another area managed by the National Trust, Lydford Gorge is a stunning area of ancient woodland along the River Lyd at Lydford, with a 1.5-mile-long walk from the White Lady Waterfall to the Devil's Cauldron.

The White Lady is a spectacular 30 metre waterfall and the Devil's Cauldron a series of startling whirlpools.

The river Lyd is fast flowing here and this attracts dippers, wagtails and a variety of finches.

Seasonal flowers add flashes of colour all along the riverside path through the woods.

The route between the falls and the cauldron can be achieved as a rigorous three mile 'round trip' or, if time or legs do not permit, there are entrances at both ends with parking, refreshments and facilities.

Taking afternoon tea while feeding cake crumbs to the grateful finches and robins at the Trust's tea shop at Devil's Cauldron was a wonderful way to end a memorable stay on Dartmoor.

www.nationaltrust.org

The South Devon Railway



The South Devon Railway is one of Devon's and the West Country's major tourist attractions and is the longest established steam railway in the south west.

The SDR, is a seven mile former Great Western Railway branch line, built in 1872, which runs along the valley of the River Dart between Buckfastleigh and Totnes.

www.southdevonrailway.co.uk

Dartmoor Accommodation



The Dartmoor Accommodation website features over 230 properties throughout Dartmoor with information on campsites, inns, B&Bs, self-catering cottages and hotels.

There is also information on working farms, guest houses with livery for equine adventures and gypsy caravans.

Dartmoor Accommodation also has a range of excellent information on Dartmoor towns and villages as well as activities and things to do in a regularly updated events diary page.

www.dartmooraccommodation.co.uk

www.dartmooraccommodation.co.uk
www.visitdartmoor.co.uk
www.dartmoor.gov.uk
www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

More information



Mark's spectacular images of Dartmoor

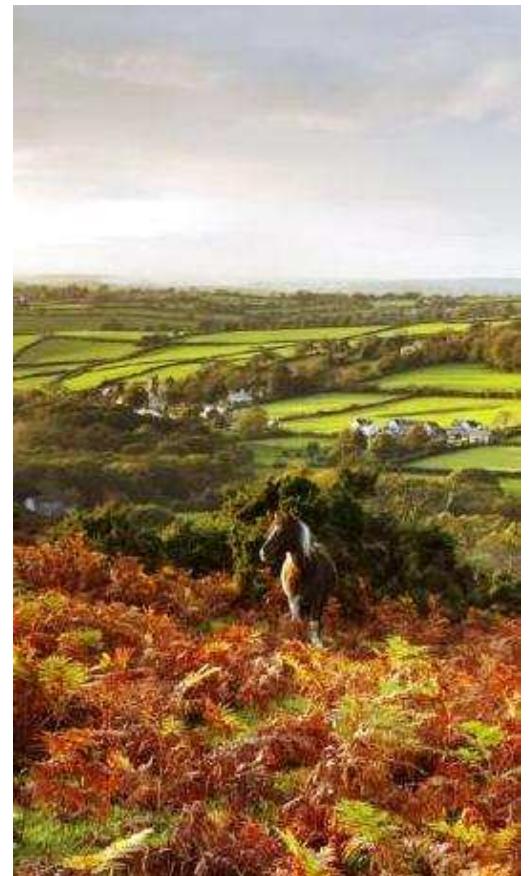
Many of the striking images used in this *AllWays traveller* have been created by Mark George, a Plymouth based photographer.

Mark has a series of stunning images of the rugged Dartmoor landscape, which illustrates perfectly the dramatic scenery of Dartmoor and 'Mother Nature's' magical light.

Mark gives presentations to photographic societies and regularly leads landscape photography workshops.

These give novice and intermediate photographers an opportunity to learn essential skills to improve their landscape photography technique.

The tuition is relaxed yet highly informative and will take place in the landscape environment, allowing photographers to experience and capture some of Dartmoor's stunning vistas.



www.markgeorgephotography.co.uk

A place to stay on Dartmoor : The Moorland Garden Hotel



By Ann Mealor

Situated in a stunning location amid nine acres of grounds on the edge of the Dartmoor National Park, the Moorland Garden Hotel is surrounded by the best nature has to offer.

The Dartmoor landscape is stunning, and there are many interesting walks that can be taken straight from the hotel.

A large variety of colourful wild flowers and birds can easily be spotted and the famous Dartmoor ponies are in abundance, grazing intently on the heath.

The garden at the Moorland, as to be expected, is delightful and features a range of sculptures in metal, stone and wicker.

A silver spider and web hangs between two trees; a wicker deer stands in pride of place on the lawn and a stone Grecian woman stands sheltered in the shrubbery.

Large and comfortable

Our room, the Lily of the Valley Suite looked out onto the garden.

Large and comfortable, it was decorated in rich gold and purples.

Side lights and lamps made for subtle, ambient lighting and fruit and homemade biscuits in the room on arrival was a welcome touch.

Cosy robes are provided and full size toiletries are in the bathroom, so you will never run short during your stay.

Places to relax

There are plenty of places to relax at the Hotel, including the comfy bar area with its coloured sofa and chairs.

Starting the day



And when the weather's fine, there is a patio area with great views - particularly come sunset.

Breakfast is served in the bright Wildflower Restaurant which overlooks the grounds.

Guests can choose a traditional Full English, including a vegetarian option, or go for a fish dish such as baked kipper with lemon or poached haddock with egg.



Dining at the Moorland Garden



Our evening meal in the Wildflower was truly delicious.

The chairs are comfortable and the tables large with crisp, white tablecloths and fresh flowers.

Cheese mousse and beetroot

I started with the goat's cheese mousse with tri-colour beetroot, granola and celery cress.

It looked colourful on the plate and the smooth white mousse contrasted well with the crunch of the granola.

Ashley had the tempura prawns, which were big and juicy, dressed in a transparently light batter with a tangy aioli mayonnaise.

For mains, I went for the sirloin steak, cooked perfectly, with a light but creamy peppercorn sauce served on the side.

The triple cooked chips were very moorish – brown, soft and fluffy on the inside.

The flat field mushrooms were also filled with flavour. Ashley went for fish of the day – a delicate, whole plaice in butter sauce scattered with brown shrimp.

Served on a bed of spinach and new potatoes, it was a mouth watering mix of flavours.



Caramelised crumble

For dessert, I chose the caramelised apple and pear crumble with crème anglaise and Ashley had the sticky toffee pudding with butterscotch sauce and clotted cream.

Both were delicious but I preferred my choice as the crumble was light and the warm crème anglaise smooth and creamy.

The restaurant has a good choice of wines – many served by the glass. We enjoyed a bottle of Taworri, a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc.



Supporting the ponies

Another nice touch is the Moorland Garden Hotel supports South West Equine Protection.

This registered charity specialises in the rescue, rehabilitation and rehoming of Moorland ponies across Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor.

In each room is a cute cuddly toy pony that guests can buy for a donation to the charity.

Alternatively visitors can just donate to this worthy cause which does such a great job.

www.swep.org.uk

Dogs too!

Dogs are welcome here, and there is no end to the number of leisurely walks you and your pet will both enjoy. You can both relax afterwards in the bar too!

www.moorlandgardenhotel.co.uk

A place to stay on Dartmoor : Lavender House



By Ann Mealor

For me, the name Lavender House, conjured up an image of a quintessentially English cottage; pretty garden, cheerful bird song, home baked cookies, earl grey tea and fine china. And I wasn't disappointed!

Situated on the edge of the moors just outside Tavistock, Lavender House is an eclectic mix of elegant French chateau, quaint olde English and vintage chic.

Originally five miners' cottages, with the oldest dating back to 1820, Lavender House has been lovingly refurbished by Susie and Nigel Bateman.

What looks good

Susie instinctively knows what looks good and where, and over the years has collected a variety of vintage curios such as huge, wrought iron French candlesticks; silver tea pots and candelabras; ornate 1950s mirrors and antique wardrobes.

With her artistic eye and natural sense of design, Susie has renovated and decorated her home in a feminine way, her pieces making each room stylish and interesting.

The rooms

Our bedroom was charming and immediately made us feel at home.

The colour scheme was soothing pale greys and whites, and a large comfortable bed, topped with a super-soft duvet and fluffy pillows took pride of place.



A silver tray with flowers, colourful china and homemade biscuits was waiting for us.

Guests can relax in other parts of the house including the spacious and comfortable sitting room and the bright, cheerful conservatory.

Breakfast can be enjoyed here whilst admiring the attractive garden, with its many mature trees, plants, neatly cut hedging and topiary.

There is a large patio, which is a sun trap and the place to unwind and read the papers or take breakfast or afternoon tea during the summer.

Lucy, the friendly and rather tubby, ginger cat is part of the furniture and enjoys pottering about.

She is happy to receive a bit of a fuss and attention from admiring visitors.

Home cooking

Breakfast at Lavender House is a real treat as Susie is an excellent chef and puts the grand, kitchen aga to good use.

Using all local produce, there is a great selection of home made dishes to choose from.

The full English breakfast with Cumberland sausages, deliciously creamy scrambled eggs with strips of smoked salmon or ham and egg parcels.

We also enjoyed a fragrant kedgeree with smoked haddock, turmeric and cardamon served with a sliced hard boiled egg.

Tangy, homemade marmalade is served with chunky, Cotswold crunch brown bread.

Susie also provides a traditional country cream tea for guests on arrival with large, homemade scones, jam and cream.

It is just as well there is the opportunity for visitors to walk off all the extra calories consumed!

Susie's artistic side

Susie's creative side extends beyond interior design and topiary, to creating beautiful and intricate bespoke head pieces for evening or bridal wear, using vintage jet, diamonte and other stones.

If you get the opportunity, ask to see some of her designs, they are stunning – you may leave with more than you bargained for!

www.dartmooraccommodation.co.uk/lavender-house/



www.markgeorgephotography.co.uk

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AllWays traveller provides travel features to destinations worldwide from the journalists in the International Travel Writers Alliance.

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