



## ***A Dramatic, Timeless, Living and Breathing Landscape***

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***"The whole country has a solitude, and an impressive grandeur, which insensibly carries the mind back to an earlier and ruder age" (R J King)***

The word Dartmoor conjures up a host of images, a dark wild upland wrapped in mists rain and wind, great piles of jumbled rock, hardy stocky ponies, a great gloomy prison, an ancient land of ruined antiquities. However the one quality that marks it out for National Park status is that it contains the largest wild open space in the south of England. What is more, much of it has long been accessible to the public.

Many of the millions of visitors each year will scramble up the mighty rocks of Haytor, make a tea stop in Princetown, stroll the village green in Widecombe or paddle in the river Dart at Dartmeet and not realise that beyond the roads lies another secret hidden Dartmoor free from cars and noise, places where you cannot see a road or houses or even fields. Those that participate in Ten Tors will inevitably share this secret. We live in such a crowded part of the world, I find it comforting to know that peace and solitude is always there to be found in the heart of Dartmoor, deep inside the National Park.

This core open moorland looks and feels so very different from the rest of rolling Devon. This must be because the central part of

Dartmoor is made up of Granite, a hard crystalline rock. It is this that makes Dartmoor an upland plateau roughly 400 metres high rising to the highest point at High Wilhays 621metres above sea level. It's the granite that gives the area its special character. It can be seen and touched where it pokes through the overlying soils and vegetation especially at and around the famous Tors. Tors vary widely in their shape from the rounded dome shaped Haytor to the great jumbled pile that is Houndtor. It is rough, hard and crystalline. It is impervious to water and acidic which explains why it is covered in waterlogged bog and moorland.

The Dartmoor story begins an astonishing 300 million years ago in a warm ocean which was gradually disappearing between two colliding continents. As with present day mountain ranges the former sea floor deposits are crushed squeezed and folded in the most dramatic way to form a mighty fold mountain range. At great depth huge upwellings of molten rock were injected into the base of these mountains. This happened at several locations along the mountain range that once stretched across what is now Cornwall and Devon. Since then the molten rock has cooled and crystallised into granite. The rocks surrounding the hot liquid magma have been baked; altered and metamorphosed. Over the next millions of years these mighty mountains have been eroded and washed away. This has left these

large areas of the more enduring granite moorland standing proud above the softer surrounding rocks. Dartmoor is the largest of these south west moors.

Although erosion has shaped the landscape for such a long time other forces have been at work. Hot gasses and liquids continued to penetrate the granite and surrounding rocks depositing the areas valuable metal ores and breaking down the actual granite to produce that useful china clay.

The drama of the landscape reflects the dramatic changes that have taken place. Sea levels have risen up and down its slopes. Extremes of hot and cold has left its marks.

Raging rivers have scoured its valleys. Blanket bog has spread and capped the moor with a generous layer of peat and finally humans and their farm animals have toiled for millennia to shape the scene we can now see.

All that change, all that past lies locked away and hidden among the peaceful grazing sheep and chaotic Tors. Let nature quietly continue to mould and decorate the granite moorland. Let each Ten Tors participant feel the extremes of wet and cold, let each discover the secrets of Dartmoor for themselves and perhaps they might discover a little about themselves as well.



12. From Princetown towards Plymouth

Elizabeth Kitson