

The History of Dartmoor

Dartmoor Factsheet



The following are some selected dates in the history of Dartmoor.

About 295 million years ago Magma intruded into the Earth's crust pushing through much of the area we now know as Devon and Cornwall. This cooled to form granite and Dartmoor came into being.

- **c2500BC** Neolithic people began building chambered tombs.
- **c2000BC** Prehistoric people began erecting standing stones, stone rows and circles and burying their dead beneath cairns.
- **c1500BC** Stone huts were built and the Dartmoor landscape was divided into territories and fields by boundaries known as reaves.
- **c600BC** Iron Age people build hillforts around Dartmoor fringes.
- **cAD900** Lydford founded as a burgh, or defended settlement, by Saxon kings of Wessex.
- **976** A Royal Mint established at Lydford until 1016.
- **981** Tavistock Abbey founded.
- **997** Viking invaders attack Lydford, unsuccessfully, and Tavistock, destroying its first abbey.
- **1086** The *Domesday Book* records a castle at Okehampton and implies another at Lydford.
- **1156** First written record of tin extraction on Dartmoor.
- **1195** Stannary courthouse and gaol built at Lydford.
- **1201** Stannary Charter (tin) issued by King John.
- **1239** King Henry III granted the manor and castle of Lydford and the Forest of Dartmoor to his brother Richard, Earl of Cornwall and Poitou.
- **1240** First known attempt to set down the boundary of the Forest of Dartmoor. The Sheriff of Devon was ordered to summon a jury of twelve knights to fix the boundary by a perambulation. This meant walking or riding round the boundary from one fixed point to the next - a journey of 50 miles (80.5km).
- **1262** Peat cutting rights set out in a Charter of Henry III.
- **1272** Trowlesworthy rabbit warren set up.
- **1278** Buckland Abbey founded.
- **1305** Ashburton, Chagford and Tavistock created as Stannary Towns.
- **1328** Plympton becomes a stannary town.
- **1337** Edward III created the Duchy of Cornwall to provide an income for his son and heir, Edward the Black Prince. The Black Prince was therefore the first Duke of Cornwall.
- **1345** Population of Lydford parish doubled in 45 years.
- **1348** The Black Death arrived in England. Many Dartmoor settlements deserted.
- **1494** First recorded Great Court of tanners held on Crockern Tor.
- **1560** Water supply via leat to Plymouth from River Meavy, near Sheepstor, proposed.
- **1591** Drake's leat completed.

- **1608** Twenty two newtaks existed on the moor.
- **c1700** Inscribed stones marking the route between Ashburton and Tavistock set up.
- **1755** Ashburton Trust administered local turnpike road.
- **1760** Okehampton Trust administered local turnpike road.
- **1762** Tavistock Trust administered local turnpike road.
- **1765** Potato market existed at Two Bridges.
- **1772** Moretonhampstead Trust administered local turnpike road.
- **1780** Large newtaks began to be created on Dartmoor.
- **1780** Last wild deer hunted on Dartmoor.
- **1789** John Andrews became the first known visitor to be guided to Cranmere Pool.
- **1791** Estimated 80,000 sheep were summered on Dartmoor.
- **1791** *Forest of Dartmoor Enclosure Bill* failed in Parliament.
- **1793** Devonport water supply leat began.
- **1806** Princetown Prison foundation stone laid by Thomas Tyrwhitt on 20 March.
- **1810** Elsewhere, William Wordsworth in his *Guide to the Lakes* stated that the Lake District should be '... a sort of national property in which every man has a right and interest who has an eye to perceive and a heart to enjoy'.
- **1820** Haytor granite tramway opened.
- **1823** The Plymouth and Dartmoor Railway, Devon's first iron railroad, opened.
- **1830** Lee Moor Pit opened to extract china clay.
- **1846** Tramroad to Zeal Tor opened.
- **1849** South Devon Railway reached Plymouth.
- **1854** James Perrott of Chagford set up first letterbox on Dartmoor at Cranmere Pool.
- **1854** 50,000 acres (20,235ha) of afforestation proposed on open moorland.
- **1858** Official opening of the Lee Moor Tramway.
- **1858** Railway reached Moretonhampstead.
- **1860** Tavistock Golf Course opened on Whitchurch Down Common.
- **1861** Tottiford Reservoir completed.
- **1861** Military manoeuvres on Dartmoor.
- **1862** 40,000 trees planted at Brimpts, near Dartmeet. Mostly felled in the First World War.
- **1863** Okehampton Turnpike Trust wound up.
- **1864** Elsewhere, Abraham Lincoln signed *Act of Congress* to set aside the Yosemite Valley in California to be used as a public park.
- **1866** Tottiford Reservoir expanded.
- **1871** London and South Western Railway reaches Okehampton.
- **1872** Elsewhere, the world's first National Park established at Yellowstone, Wyoming, USA on 1 March.

- 1874 Railway reached Lydford.
- 1875 War Office established a permanent camp at Okehampton.
- 1875 Sourton Ice Works opened.
- 1879 Rattlebrook Tramway built.
- 1880 Horse drawn coach services for visitors to Dartmoor started at Bovey Tracey.
- 1883 Dartmoor Preservation Association (DPA) formed.
- 1883 Railway reached Princetown.
- 1884 Kennick Reservoir completed.
- 1888 Hansford Worth presented a paper to Plymouth Institution advocating Dartmoor to be a Public Park, similar to American National Parks.
- 1889 Elsewhere, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) formed.
- 1893 Dartmoor Exploration Committee formed and began archaeological excavations at Grimspound.
- 1893 Work began on the construction of Burrator Dam.
- 1894 Robert Burnard, Member of the Dartmoor Exploration Committee, published *The Acquisition of the Forestry of Dartmoor as a County Park*.
- 1895 Duchy of Cornwall granted licence to military.
- 1895 Elsewhere, the National Trust formed.
- 1898 Burrator Reservoir completed.
- 1898 Mr Seale Hayne MP gave information in Parliament that over 15,000 acres (6070ha) of Dartmoor common land had been enclosed since 1820.
- 1901 *Military Manoeuvres Bill* discussed but dropped by Parliament.
- 1901 -1902 *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, by Arthur Conan Doyle, first published - as nine parts in *The Strand Magazine*.
- 1907 Venford and Trenchford Reservoirs completed.
- 1910 Redlake Tramway built.
- 1910 Red grouse introduced onto Dartmoor, but never thrived.
- 1911 Day excursion trains from London to Dartmoor became available.
- 1911 Official opening of the Red Lake Tramway to facilitate china clay extraction.
- 1912 Elsewhere, the Society for the Preservation of Nature Reserves was founded.
- 1918 Yelverton Golf Course opened on Roborough Down Common.
- 1919 Scheme to build eight reservoirs to service five new hydro electric power stations dropped.
- 1919 Elsewhere, the Forestry Commission created.
- 1919 Duchy of Cornwall planted 5,000 acres (2,026ha) of moorland under coniferous trees at Fernworthy.
- 1921 Brimpts Plantation replanted.
- 1925 Dartmoor Pony Society formed.
- 1926 Reservoir at Swincombe proposed.
- 1926 Elsewhere, the Council for the Preservation of England was founded (CPRE).
- 1928 Burrator Reservoir expanded.
- 1929 Elsewhere, CPRE invited Government to investigate the possibility of national parks.
- 1929 Elsewhere, Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald appointed the Addison Committee to study the feasibility of national parks.
- 1930 Forestry Commission take over management of 3,100 acres (1,256 ha) of land for eventual afforestation.
- 1930 Golden Dagger, the last tin mine to be worked on Dartmoor, closed.
- 1931 Elsewhere, the Report of the Addison Committee recommended national reserves and nature sanctuaries should be established.
- 1931 Rattlebrook Tramway closed.
- 1932 Redlake Tramway closed.
- 1932 Elsewhere, the Mass Trespass took place on Kinder Scout in the Peak District on 24 April.
- 1936 Elsewhere, the Joint Standing Committee for National Parks set up with Sir Norman Birkett KC as Chairman.
- 1936 Work began on the construction of Fernworthy Reservoir Dam.
- 1937 Two Bills to harness Dartmoor's water for power and supply fail in Parliament.
- 1937 Dartmoor Preservation Association meeting reaffirms its belief in a Dartmoor National Park.
- 1939 Elsewhere, *Access to Mountains Act* passed but never implemented.
- 1942 Elsewhere *Land Utilisation in Rural Areas (Scott Report)* published.
- 1942 Fernworthy Reservoir completed.
- 1945 Duchy of Cornwall leased Soussons Down to Forestry Commission which fenced, deep ploughed and planted 550 acres (223 ha) with conifers.
- 1945 Elsewhere, *National Parks in England and Wales (Dower Report)* published in May. This proposed Dartmoor as a national park.
- 1945 Elsewhere, Sir Arthur Hobhouse appointed Chairman of the Committee on National Parks in England and Wales in July.
- 1947 Elsewhere, *Committee on National Parks in England and Wales (Hobhouse Report)* published in July. This delineated the area of Dartmoor to become a National Park.
- 1947 Elsewhere, *Conservation of Nature in Scotland (Ramsay Report)* failed to create national parks in Scotland.
- 1947 Public inquiry into military use of Dartmoor.
- 1949 Ten houses built at Bellever to house Forestry Commission workers.
- 1949 Elsewhere, *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act* passed on 16 December. This created the National Parks Commission and set out the National Park purposes of preserving and enhancing the beauty of National Parks and promoting their enjoyment by the public.
- 1949 Elsewhere, the Nature Conservancy Council created by Royal Charter.
- 1950 There were estimated to be about 30,000 ponies on Dartmoor moorland.
- 1951 Elsewhere, the Peak District confirmed as England's first National Park on 17 April.
- 1951 Planning permission granted to allow china clay extraction at Lee Moor.
- 1951 Elsewhere Snowdonia confirmed as the first National Park in Wales on 18 October.
- 1951 Dartmoor National Park designation confirmed on 30 October.
- 1952 Dartmoor National Park Committee Members appointed; this Committee established as a Committee of Devon County Council.
- 1952 Inquiry into military uses of Ringmoor Down.
- 1953 Dartmoor Commoners' Association came into being.

- 1954 Myxomatosis introduced into the wild rabbit population.
- 1956 Devon declared a Rabbit Clearance Area, thus bringing to an end the Dartmoor warrening tradition.
- 1957 Avon Dam completed.
- 1957 Taw Marsh water pumping wells installed to extract water; later found to be radio-active and emitting radon.
- 1958 Last commercial peat cutting venture on Dartmoor failed.
- 1958 Lee Moor clay extraction permission granted on appeal in January.
- 1960 *Road Traffic Act* passed - now offence to drive off-road on Dartmoor.
- 1960 The first Ten Tors Expedition assembled to walk a course of 55 miles (88.5km).
- 1962 Railway line to Ashburton closed.
- 1963 *Water Resources Act* required water authorities to seek new reservoir sites to meet future water need. Swincombe Reservoir was proposed.
- 1964 Railway line to Moretonhampstead closed.
- 1965 Roadside banking built along A386 to prevent cars driving off-road.
- 1968 Elsewhere, the *Countryside Act* replaces the National Parks Commission with the Countryside Commission.
- 1968 Meldon Reservoir site chosen instead of Gorhuish (outside Dartmoor National Park) in November.
- 1969 Voluntary Afforestation Agreement between the Forestry Commission and the Dartmoor National Park Authority.
- 1970 Swincombe Reservoir site rejected by Parliament.
- 1972 Meldon Reservoir officially opened.
- 1972 Elsewhere, the *Local Government Act* directed County Councils to form separate National Park Committees to which planning and countryside functions were to be delegated.
- 1972 Lee Moor china clay extraction and tipping permission granted after Public Inquiry.
- 1973 Elsewhere, *Defence Lands Committee (Nugent Report)* published. Training areas on Dartmoor reduced by two square miles (5.18 sq km).
- 1974 Elsewhere, Local Government Reorganisation enacted the 1972 Direction. Ian Mercer was appointed as the first National Park Officer for the Dartmoor National Park Authority.
- 1974 Elsewhere, *Local Government (Finance) Act* created the National Park Supplementary Grant which provided 75% of the funds required by National Parks on the understanding that the County Council paid the remaining 25%.
- 1974 Elsewhere *National Park Policy Review Committee (Sandford Report)* published.
- 1975 Dartmoor identified by European Economic Community as a Less-Favoured Area on 28 April.
- 1977 *Continued Use of Dartmoor by Ministry of Defence for Military Training (Sharp Report)* published. Proposed the setting up of the Dartmoor Steering Committee and Working Party and that training be transferred from Ringmoor Down to Cramber Tor.
- 1977 First *Dartmoor National Park Plan* published.
- 1978 Dartmoor declared a Special Investment Area by the Development Commission on 31 March.
- 1979 The Dartmoor National Park Authority established its operational headquarters at Parke, Bovey Tracey.
- 1980 Much of Dartmoor acquired Assisted Area Status.
- 1980 Ringmoor Down Military Training Licence over 1,168 acres (4,73 ha) terminated by the National Trust.
- 1981 South West Water licensed military training on 1,235 acres (500 ha) of Cramber Tor for two years.
- 1981 Elsewhere *Wildlife and Countryside Act* passed.
- 1983 Revised Afforestation Agreement between the Forestry Commission and Dartmoor National Park Authority signed on 4 February.
- 1983 HRH the Prince of Wales visited Dartmoor National Park Authority headquarters at Parke, Bovey Tracey on 9 March, to meet staff and preside at Duchy Estate Management Steering Committee.
- 1983 *Dartmoor National Park Plan First Review* published.
- 1983 Cramber Tor licence extended to 1988.
- 1983 Okehampton Bypass southern route through part of the Dartmoor National Park approved by Department of the Environment and Transport on 19 September.
- 1983 Willsworthy military ranges planning application for modernisation granted by Secretary of State for the Environment.
- 1983 Postbridge, Dartmoor National Park Authority's first purpose-built Information Centre, opened.
- 1984 Elsewhere work began on Roadford Reservoir.
- 1985 *Dartmoor Commons Act* passed. This established a legal right of access on foot and horseback on all Dartmoor common land and also vested powers to regulate grazing in the hands of a new Dartmoor Commoners' Council.
- 1985 There were estimated to be less than 3,000 ponies on Dartmoor.
- 1986 First Dartmoor Commoners' Council members elected on 30 June.
- 1986 The *West Devon (Parishes) Order* confirmed. Lydford parish, once incorporating the whole of the Forest of Dartmoor, was greatly reduced in size, and the Forest of Dartmoor parish was created. Sticklepath parish was newly created out of parts of Belstone, Sampford Courtenay and South Tawton parishes.
- 1988 Review of *Forestry Act* brought in greater safeguards to broadleaved woodland on Dartmoor.
- 1988 Restoration by Dartmoor National Park Authority of St Lawrence Chapel, Ashburton, completed on 14 May.
- 1988 Okehampton Bypass officially opened.
- 1989 Dartmoor Pony Support Scheme began on 1 March.
- 1989 Dartmoor National Park Byelaws came into effect on 17 April.
- 1989 Elsewhere, Roadford Reservoir completed in October.
- 1990 Severe storms destroy 3% of Dartmoor's woodland (approx 107,000 trees) on 25 January.
- 1991 Elsewhere, *Fit for the Future - Report of the National Parks Review Panel (Edwards Report)* published on 21 March.
- 1991 Duchy of Cornwall renewed military training licence over 23,116 acres (9,355 ha) for 21 years on 29 September.
- 1991 *Dartmoor National Park Plan Second Review* published on 30 October.
- 1991 Monitoring Landscape Change project completed for all National Parks on 12 December. Dartmoor National Park estimated to be 368 square miles (954 sq km) in area not 365 as quoted since 1951.
- 1992 From 1 April planning applications now sent direct to the Dartmoor National Park Authority instead of the relevant District Council.
- 1992 Cramber Tor Licence renewed until 2.7.2001 on 1 July.

- 1993 High Moorland Visitor Centre opened by HRH the Prince of Wales, at Princetown on 9 June.
- 1993 New facilities for the disabled opened at Princetown and Bellever on 7 October.
- 1994 Dartmoor designated an Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) on 1 April.
- 1994 Dartmoor boundary amended which meant the exclusion of Lee Moor in the National Park.
- 1994 *Dartmoor Traffic Management Strategy* published in June.
- 1994 Use of Roborough Down Training Area ceased on 1 October.
- 1994 Fencing of A382 began after public inquiry and Secretary of State's decision on 1 August.
- 1995 *Dartmoor National Park Local Plan* published.
- 1995 *Environment Act* passed. This Act made provision for the establishment of free-standing National Park Authorities.

The Act revises the statutory purposes of National Parks which are now designated for the purposes of (i) conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area; and (ii) promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities (... of the areas) by the public. Furthermore, if it appears that there is a conflict between those purposes, the National Park Authorities shall attach greater weight to the purposes of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage. Other relevant authorities (ministers, public bodies, statutory undertakers, etc) now have a statutory duty to have regard to these purposes in the exercise of their own functions.

The *Environment Act* also requires that each National Park Authority, in pursuing the purposes of the National Parks, shall seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Park, but without incurring significant expenditure in doing so, and all for that purpose, co-operate with local authorities and public bodies whose functions include the promotion of economic or social development within the area of the National Park.

- 1996 October. New Dartmoor National Park Authority established as a shadow authority with powers to set up the necessary financial and administrative mechanisms for its future operation.

The existing Dartmoor National Park Committee of 21 members, a committee of Devon County Council, continued to function to 31 March, 1997.

- 1996 Moor Care, a part European funded programme to combat erosion on Dartmoor, initiated.
- 1997 April. The free-standing National Park Authority is fully established.

The new Authority comprises 26 Members. Seven Members are appointed by Devon County Council, seven by the District Councils (three from West Devon Borough Council, three from Teignbridge District Council and one from South Hams District Council). Twelve Members are Government appointees, five of whom represent parish council interests. The remaining seven Government appointees are usually local persons, with specialist knowledge or a particular interest in the National Park.

- 1998 29 September. Launch of the Dart Biodiversity Project which aims to achieve practical benefits for wildlife within the River Dart catchment area on Dartmoor.

- 1999 29 September. Elsewhere, Government announces two new National Parks in England to be created (South Downs and New Forest).
- 1999 The International League for the Protection of Horses makes available reflective neck collars to help prevent roadside pony casualties.
- 1999 11 August - the moon moved between the earth and the Sun bringing a total eclipse to the West Country and a partial eclipse to the rest of the United Kingdom. This was the first total eclipse to cross the British Isles since June 1927, and the first to darken parts of Dartmoor and south Devon since a pair of eclipses in 1715 and 1724.
- 2000 The *Countryside and Rights of Way Act* passed.
- 2000 *Dartmoor National Park Management Plan Consultation Draft* published in January.
- 2000 *Dartmoor National Park Local Plan, Issues Papers, First Alteration 1995 - 2011* published in February.
- 2000 *Dartmoor National Park Authority's, first Best Value Performance Plan 2000 - 2001* published in March.
- 2000 Dartmoor Commoners' Council introduce a regulation that from 1 January of each year all stallions put out on the Dartmoor commons must be accredited as being sound in conformation, strong, healthy, hardy, and displaying good male characteristics and being fit for Dartmoor's demanding conditions with the aim to improve the quality of ponies. The Council also implemented the mandatory annual removal of all foals off the commons between 1 January and 1 April.
- 2000 A moorland bird survey, co-funded between Dartmoor National Park Authority, MAFF, RSPB, the Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Association and English Nature, revealed that Dartmoor's population levels of stonechat, whinchat, and meadow pipit are of international importance: Dartmoor populations of skylark, wheatear and Dartford warbler of national importance. Reflecting national declines, curlew and lapwing populations had fallen dramatically.
- 2001 *Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan* published.
- 2001 50th Anniversary of Dartmoor as a National Park.
- 2001 February. Foot and Mouth disease outbreak confirmed nationally, and on Dartmoor.
- 2001 China clay companies relinquish planning permissions at Lee Moor and Shaugh Lake.
- 2002 Dartmoor Sustainable Development Fund established (with Government assistance).
- 2002 Dartmoor Local Access Forum established.
- 2002 *State of Farming on Dartmoor, 2000* A report commissioned by the National Park Authority and carried out by the Centre for Rural Research, Exeter University, published.
- 2004 Dartmoor Hill Farm Project launched.
- 2004 *Dartmoor National Park Local Plan: 1995 - 2011 Adopted version* published.

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Useful web links for further information:

- Other factsheets:
 - History and Development of the Dartmoor National Park Authority
<http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk/dnp/factfile/homepage.html>
- Other publications:
 - *Dartmoor National Park Management Plan 2001*
<http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk/dnp/planning/mplan.html>

Other publications (not available on-line):

- A Guide to the Archaeology of Dartmoor
Dartmoor National Park Authority
- Dartmoor National Park Guide
Pevensey Press, David & Charles

For further information, and a list of other Fact Sheets available, contact the:
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