

## **STAN AND PAM'S WALK OVER DARTMOOR. September 1983**

*Editor's Notes:-*

*All Hallows church needed rewiring, in order to help to raise funds to support the church Stan and Pam Brunskill walked from North Dartmoor across the moor overnight to Ivybrdge late September 1983.*

*This transcript starts with music of 'Uncle Tom Cobly' and consists of two sessions with the interviewer, Peter Lutwyche (PL) who extracts from Stan and Pam all the interesting tales on their walk across Dartmoor from the north to the south.*

*PL:- Well our churches always seem to be falling down or wanting repairs and they never seem to have enough money to carry out those repairs. Now Ringmore is no exception to this, the church has to be re-wired and that's going to entail a bill of something into four figures. And so two people in Ringmore thought they might help with this - Pam and Stan Brunskill. They have done a sponsored walk right across Dartmoor from north to south and they very kindly consented to come and tell us something about it. So, Pam and Stan, what about it! What started you off on this? Have you done a lot of it before or was this just a first effort?*

Day One

*Stan and Pam:* Well we've never done such a long walk before, but of course we love Dartmoor and we get on there as much as we can - which is not often enough. But we've had the idea that we would like to do this walk for a long time now, with the idea that we would camp on the moor. In fact, we didn't do this because we felt it was a little bit too late in the year. It's quite a good time to go walking on the moor but we felt it might be rather cold at night which was why we decided against camping this time. We also took into consideration the fact that our knapsacks would have been quite heavy with the tent and sleeping bags etc. Additionally I (*Pam*) was recovering from an operation, and Stan has back trouble as well, so in the end we decided on having bed and breakfast at Two Bridges at the end of the first day. It all started off earlier in the year when we were going to do this walk in May, but as Pam has said she had to have an operation and so we postponed it. Everybody told her she would never do it this year, which made her more determined to prove them wrong! She had been the driving force behind it – I would have put it off to next year. I (*Pam*) said that I would be ready to do it at the end of September or beginning of October and in actual fact we did it on the 30 September.

*PL:-:* Pam and Stan are not a couple of athletic teenagers, athletic yes, very athletic - but I think they would both agree that they have left their teenage days well behind them. I hope you don't mind me saying that.

*Stan and Pam:* No, because it is quite true! Going back to your point about walking on the moor, the weather is very unpredictable of course. It's

not so much the rain for which we are equipped, but the mist and fog for which you have to take every precaution because it would be foolhardy and irresponsible to launch yourself on the moor, especially at this time of the year without proper equipment: compasses, survival bags, first aid kit, emergency rations, whistles, matches, torches etc. You never know if one of you might sprain an ankle and have to go off and get help. Because on the whole walk, which took two days, more or less, we saw seven people and four of those were in one party. Pretty isolated. Another thing to be avoided as well are the Army firing ranges. So, before we decided on an actual date for the walk we did have to check with the Army that they wouldn't be firing in a particular area that we wanted to cover. They were very co-operative in giving out information, and had a detailed map showing the firing ranges.

*PL:-* Well now then, tell us all about it, how far did you go?

*Stan and Pam:* Well, we walked from Okehampton Camp along the Army military road - we were taken up there by our son-in-law and we set off about 0600hrs on the Thursday morning. It was barely light because we were at Cranmere Pool at 0630hrs. It was beautiful, the sun wasn't quite over the horizon and the grouse were flying up and calling and it was wonderful. There are a lot of red grouse in the Cranmere area on the northern moor. To create a little bit of interest we decided that we would get the four Dartmoor post-box stamps – Cranmere Pool, Fur Tor, Crow Tor and Ducks Pool on the southern moor. We had to make a little detour to

get them but we created a little bit of interest and were able to show that we had done the walk. There is a stamp at these remote places and we stamped Cranmere Pool at 0715. And then we had to cross some rather rough terrain to get to Fir Tor. It is quite a difficult walk, part of it through a peat path, which wasn't too bad, and then we had a very steep climb indeed up to Fur Tor and we arrived there at 0930 on a lovely clear morning. Perhaps the listeners might be interested to know a little about the peat passes because a lot of the ground has been cut. Peat dug out indiscriminately which then leaves holes and you really have got to leap from one tussock to another but otherwise it is bog. The peat cutters in the old days could take their peat home via ponies; they cut a path through the peat bogs and these have been maintained over the years by cattle men and hunters. So if you can find one of these peat paths you can pass through comparatively easily. It is really necessary to take compass bearings beforehand otherwise they can be difficult to find. So we left Fur Tor at 1000hrs and we were heading for a path called the north west Barn Cut Hill. We found it but suddenly a mist came down all around us and the stillness was quite eerie, so we rested for about half an hour in the hope that the mist would clear. But it obviously wasn't going to, and fortunately we had taken compass bearings of the whole route before we left home and we had to rely on our compass bearing to Crow Tor where there is another letter box. These letter boxes are just metal boxes which are hidden in a crack in the Tor, and inside the box is a visitor's book, where you sign your name, and a rubber stamp and stamp pad and you stamp your own book. It would be wrong to think that someone would be waiting

there to stamp your book! These spots are isolated and remote. Interestingly enough at Cranmere Pool there was an entry from, (whom I assume would be the son of), Henry Williamson who wrote Tarka the Otter. A short note said 'my father was here in 1926 – see Tarka the Otter'. We arrived at Crow Tor eventually at 1300hrs where we had our sandwiches and a drink of coffee, and then suddenly at 1400hrs the mist cleared again and it was sunny and warm and we had a nap – being in good time! When the mist lifted we were exactly where we expected to be! The problem with compass bearings is that we know they work, but you have to be very careful that you don't make a mistake and of course, you never seem to be walking as quickly as you would expect to be walking, and you suddenly get this feeling that you ought to be there, and you're not. And you wonder if you have made a mistake and begin to worry! But we did arrive at the right place, and we saw places we had never been before, but in retrospect we realised that we were in the right place, but never having been there before there was nothing that we could recognise! The visibility, once the mist cleared, was only maybe 20 or 30 yards so you couldn't make out any far points to head along to. At times it was quite frightening but the important thing is to have faith in your compass bearing! Pam usually fell into step behind Stan except when you fell in the mire! So, we are now at Crow Tor which is above Two Bridges with the West Dart just below us to our west. After our rest we walked down to the West Dart along Wistmans Wood, and had a very pleasant walk to Two Bridges where we spent the night. It can be quite a worry and strain walking on compass bearings, and it was a relief to reach our destination.

That was the end of day one. Well we photographed Highland cattle and we saw a white bull which we were rather surprised at because we didn't think that bulls were allowed to roam on the moor, but this was actually in a field. We bathed our feet in the West Dart river. The feet had stood up well to the walking. The water level was low in the river and just below Crow Tor there is a water off-take – the Devonport Leat – so they were taking water off the river to fill the Devonport Leat. All part and parcel of the drought. Anyway, having got to Two Bridges we spent the night in a guest house and had a nice meal in the hotel in the evening. And of course, at the guest house we had a lovely hot bath! It was greatly appreciated! After our meal we were in bed by 2030hrs having had a long day – we left Ringmore at 0430hrs to get up to Okehampton for 0600hrs.

## **Day Two**

*PL:- Well today we are going to hear from Stan and Pam on their memories of the walk from Two Bridges across to Ivybridge. I believe it was a bit hairy wasn't it?*

Well we had an enormous breakfast and the landlady said 'if you're walking to Ivybridge you'll need a good breakfast' and my word, wasn't it a good breakfast! But we were very glad we had all that food because the walk was quite strenuous. It was more strenuous than the first day with more mental strain on the second day because the mist was with us the whole

way. The visibility was only about 30 yards all the way, but as we got into Ivybridge the mist lifted gradually - but it was still misty. So it was a compass walk all the way. If we'd have started off on that day we wouldn't have gone, but we had to get home and we were confident that we could it, so we made a start. We were going to go across country to Whiteworks, which is on the moor near Princetown, but as we'd never done that before we walked, instead, along the road from Two Bridges to Princetown and then down the road to Whiteworks. That was the first stage. And then we walked along the leat from Whiteworks to Nuncross Farm, and from there we made our way heading to Ducks Pool for the next letterbox. We took a compass bearing and went directly there and arrived right in the middle of Ducks Pool. It isn't actually a pool nowadays, although it probably was at one time, but it is likely that the tanners actually drained it. Ducks Pool is a name that everyone seems to know and it is the site of the Crossing's Memorial, which is a granite stone dedicated to a Mr William Crossing who wrote the 'bible of Dartmoor'. Anyone who wants to know anything about Dartmoor needs to refer to his book called 'William Crossing's Guide to Dartmoor'. The next part of the moor we had never walked before so it was disappointing in fact that it was misty. It was a bit hairy navigating by compass in unknown country, because although we trusted our compass bearing you still have to avoid bogs and mires and it isn't straightforward walking by any means. When you can see, you can fix your eye on something in the distance, maybe half a mile away, and then you may have to go round a mire, but you can see to come back to get on track to reach your particular rock or tree. But of course in the mist there is nothing to fix

your eye on because you can't see far enough ahead when it's misty, and the danger is that you will wander off one way or the other. It is a bit worrying and very easy to lose your way. The other problem is you see a sheep or pony track, which is much easier walking, and you are fed up with picking your feet up over the tussocks and it is much easier to wander off on a sheep track thinking it's easier, but you would be wandering off your course. You must keep to your compass bearing. We had planned escape routes as we knew that the river Erme was flowing down to our right so if we had actually got lost we would have made our way down to the Erme and then of course we could have got back without getting lost. But, without a compass you don't know whether you're walking north, south, east or west. You haven't got a clue! Without a compass you could easily go round in circles. And from the map we had worked it out that we would cross the longest stone row on Dartmoor, which is about 2 miles long. But we didn't see it, and we think we must have walked right through it! The stones would be either side but we couldn't see them in the mist. The origin of these stones are almost anyone's guess, some people say they are connected with ley lines, some people say that they are connected with an ancient religion; there tends to be cairns or barrows or burial grounds or graves perhaps at one end of them, but we know so little about them it's probably a fascinating aspect of the moor that you can go on and have your own thoughts about them and you could be just as right as anybody else. Nobody knows for sure, and some people think that the cairns were put there after the rows and some people would say that this was where a very important person was buried, and put a row of stones



leading up to his grave, but we just don't know. But they are pre-bronze or bronze age. We were very disappointed at having missed the 'row' and we planned to return there to see this stone row at a later date. But they are quite fascinating and the southern moor especially, is very rich in bronze age relics. It was quite heavily populated about 3 thousand years ago or earlier. And there are still quite distinct hut circles. But coming back to the present day we then headed for Red Lake Mire. It was very 'mirey' around that area and we were trying to make our way across one of the mires with Stan, being in the lead, and Pam trying to tread exactly where he had stepped but I, (Pam), misjudged and completely lost my right leg in one of the mires! You can really go into these mires and there was a poor dead pony just a short distance away who had also got trapped in the mire. It can be very dangerous. Stan had to heave Pam out, and we are here to tell the tale! You don't take any notice of getting wet on the moor. We didn't get too wet walking in the mist because, surprisingly enough, it wasn't like walking through a light drizzle fortunately! We did actually get a bit wet, near where Pam fell in, but we were on course, and we had to make a longer detour heading for the 'tramway' which comes from the spoil heap at Red Lake down to Bittaford and Ivybridge. This was china clay, and a tramway was built to take the workers and materials to the site. The clay was brought down in a conduit in pipes mixed with water. There were rails for the tramway although you can't see them today. The Red Lake spoil it, it being quite a landmark on southern Dartmoor and our walk would have been much easier had we been able to observe that, but we didn't see it at all. We must have been within a quarter of a mile of it, but we

didn't see it! Interestingly enough, a minute or two before we actually stepped on the tramway I was beginning to worry, because we ought to have been there. But of course detours round mires and bogs delayed us. But once on the tramway we observed a figure about 10 or 20 yards away, and we didn't know at the time, but he'd stepped on the tramway from the opposite direction, he'd come up on another tramway from Shipley Bridge, near Avon Dam. We came towards each other and he said 'I'm glad I'm not the only mad person!' He was hoping to do a round trip but decided to go back the same way because of the lack of visibility!

So that was really the exciting bit over, the relief when we found the tramway was immense, because although we knew there was another  $7\frac{3}{4}$  miles at least we were safe. And it was just a plod down the tramway, which would have been beautiful scenery if only we could have seen something! There is a beautiful view on the right of the River Erme in the valley and the best we could do was to get odd glimpses of it occasionally. The tramway took us to the end of our journey, just seeing the one man! We finished up at the Western Engineering Works near Bittaford, then we walked into Ivybridge and picked the car up in the town and drove home. I think that Pam was fitter than Stan at the end of the second day, we both found that our feet were beginning to ache. We had done between 18 and 19 miles on that day, which was in fairly rough country. But we are by no means the only ones to have walked across the moor, many people do it! It takes a bit of planning and effort but it was wonderful. You always have to have the greatest respect for Dartmoor and use and take compass bearings. I don't think we saw any ponies on the second day, we did see

ponies on the first day, and of course lots of sheep. Cows loomed up enormously in the mist; the only birds we saw were meadow pipits. We saw nothing on the river. Although in previous walks we have seen a mink family.

To sum up: We started off at Okehampton Camp, then the first stop was Cranmere Pool, West Oatment river, Nicett, and Great Nicett, and then down the valley and on to Fir Tor which is about 2000 feet. Across the north-west passage and then we should have seen the West Dart Head, we passed the top of where the West Dart rises, but of course we knew it was there, but we didn't see anything. Then we went on to Flat Tor, Rough Tor where there is a lot of Army huts, in fact we thought we were at Crow Tor, but in fact we were at Rough Tor. So it just shows you how wrong you can be, we were on the right lines but not in the right place. We took a bearing to Rough Tor and walked down to Crow Tor. Then down the West Dart Valley to Two Bridges.

On the second day we went from Two Bridges to Princetown, Whiteworks which is near Fox Tor mire, Nuncross Farm which is still standing in a reasonable condition, across to Ducks Pool and then on to Green Hill above the Erme to Red Lake, and then down the tramway to Bittaford and on to Ivbridge.

We did this to help re-wire the church and we made £250. We were very pleased with people's generosity.

*Back to the music of Uncle Tom Cobble!*

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