

Newport Outdoor Group (YHA)



Editor

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Web Site

<http://walk.to/nogs>

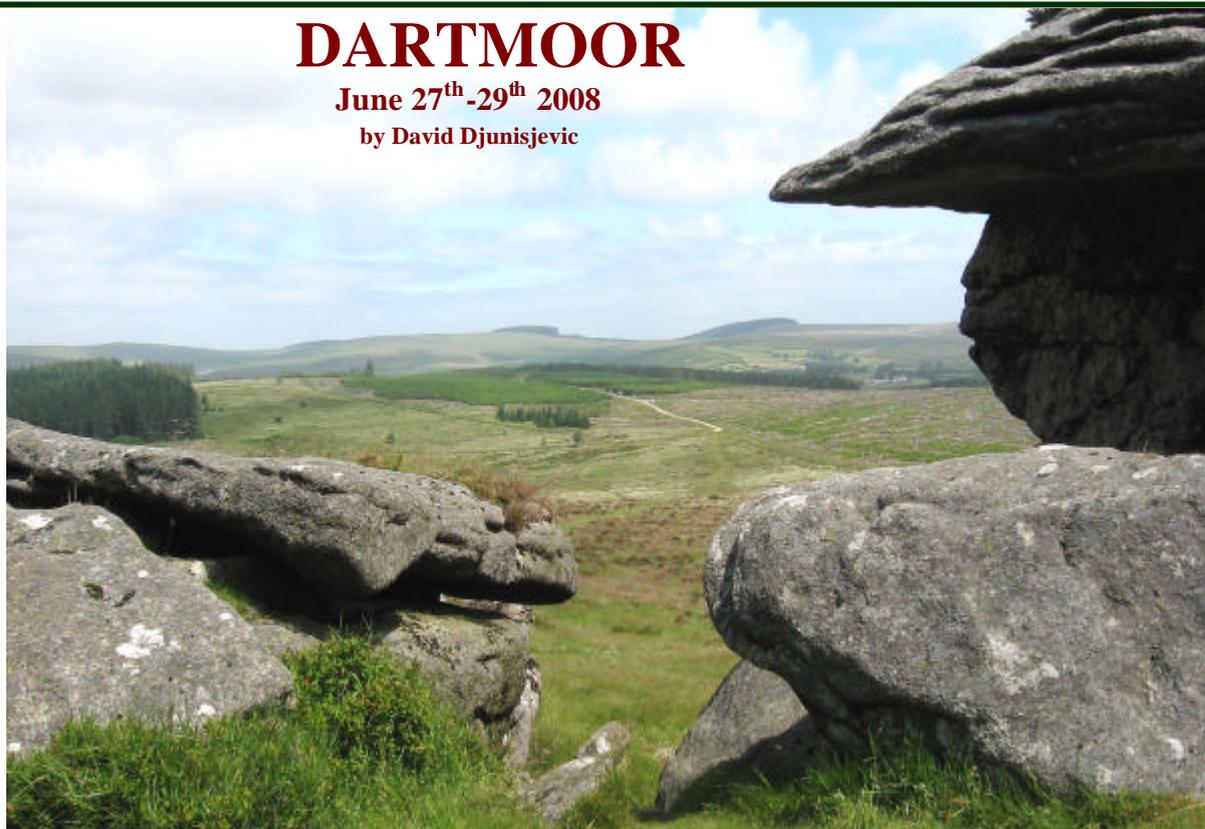
“Yes, folks, this hostelry actually specialises in catering for the discerning dog-owner! Pictures of dogs are everywhere, and the management operates a flea-bag friendly policy”.

***Get
The
Outdoor
Habit!***

DARTMOOR

June 27th-29th 2008

by David Djunisjevic



One of the great benefits (arguably the *only* benefit) of just having endured the worst pub meal of one's life is the happy conviction that things can only get better. With this comforting thought I fortified myself as, together with Chris, I left the Prospect Inn on Exeter's waterfront. We'd stopped off on our way to the hostel, thinking to see a little of Exeter on the way. With the exception of the aforementioned hostelry, what we did see was quietly encouraging, and worthy of a further visit.

A few hours saw us at Bellever, a solid hostel sitting squarely in a solid landscape. The usual preliminaries having been attended to (grab best bunk, stow food in fridge, make some coffee, enquire about hostel meal menu and local boozers....) hunger drove us into the village of Postbridge to see what the local had to offer.

Happily, what it did have to offer was cuisine of a sophistication quite unknown in certain other eateries not a million miles away; I was particularly impressed by the way *this* establishment actually *cooked* the potatoes before serving them. Also on offer was a good range of real ales, and a warm atmosphere. A few pints and a few hours later I exchanged the warm atmosphere for a warm bunk, and slept well.

The Saturday walk was something of a minor classic, not excelling in any one respect, but rather being a harmonious blend of all that goes to make a good walk. From the hostel, we walked west-ish to Postbridge, then south up and over Bellever Tor, descending to a road. Crossing the road was easy – crossing the West Dart

River by stepping stones was a little trickier, but much more rewarding. There can surely be few pleasures to match the smug sense of security a man feels when he has just stepping-stoned a river and looks back, camera poised, to watch his comrades make the attempt. I watched, I waited, but nobody fell in. I reckon Dave *might* have, but he bottled it by rolling up his kecks and wading!

The second part of the walk unearthed a little gem, the Forest Inn near Hexworthy. It may not be the oldest inn in Britain, nor the highest, nor even the prettiest, but it is surely the doggiest! Yes, folks, this hostelry actually specialises in catering for the discerning dog-owner!

Pictures of dogs are everywhere, and the management operates a fleabag friendly policy. Chris -



resolved to return with Molly at a future date.

After a little lubrication, we struck north over Laughter Tor, and down to a forested picnic site for our afternoon break. From there it was but a stone's proverbial to the hostel.

That evening we dined in the hostel. Perhaps nothing epitomises the improvement in general hostel standards as much as the meals, and Saturday's dinner was no exception. I had a combination of three local sausages (proper ones, made by a local butcher from venison and such). It was good grub and plenty of it. Mention should also be made of the "Jail Ale", a local brew available in the hostel. Although a tasty brew, it suffers from the disadvantage of being so heavily laden with sediment that each glass takes about five minutes to pour, very carefully, from the bottle!

And so to bed.

And so up again, and ready to walk.

This time, we weren't walking from the hostel-this time, we had to drive to Widdecombe. And yes, it was *that* Widdecombe, as in "fair", of Uncle Tom Cobley fame!

Now it is the general rule that the Saturday walk is the harder of the two, the duration of the Sunday walk being somewhat limited by the need to get back home at a reasonable time. For some reason, however, I found this walk a bit harder than the previous day's offering. Maybe it was the steep long-ish ascent that started us off, or just old age. We set off up Hamel Down and struck north along the ridge, with good views in all directions. After a couple of miles, we turned east down into the valley and, after following the road south for a while, turned off up the magnificently-named Honeybag Tor. From then it was due south over Chinkwell Tor and Bonehill Down (why is it everyone else's areas have better place-names than your own?). Here we caught a good view of Widdecombe, and one that answered a question that had been nagging at me since the start of the walk.

Why would a little place like Widdecombe have its own fair? From the ridge, the answer presented itself. Widdecombe revealed itself as covering a much larger area than was apparent at village level. The area, however, was not uniformly filled with houses, but with scattered groups of buildings, with what appeared to be the ghostly imprint on the landscape of structures that had formerly stood there. I'd guess that Widdecombe was a lot bigger in the past than it is now. Then it was back down the road to the village, and the statutory tea-shop.

All in all, a most agreeable weekend, sweetened still further for me by excellent performance of my new and remarkably cheap Goretex fabric boots. After years of resistance, I had purged my soul of the iron conviction that the only proper boots for a *gentleman* to wear on a walk were leather ones, and that this fabric nonsense was just another ploy by the Ali-G generation to corrupt the essential *decency* of the walking community! I had lowered the drawbridge of prejudice and taken a leap of faith, and a step into a brighter, sunnier and more rewarding life!

Thank you, Dartmoor; you've made an ~~old~~ middle-aged man very happy!

