

Where you can walk

Open access

In areas where there is open access, generally you do not have to stay on footpaths, bridleways or other rights of way. The public has legal open access to approximately 47,400 hectares of Dartmoor. Of this total, public access on foot (and horseback) to the Dartmoor commons, extending for some 35,200 hectares, was secured under the *Dartmoor Commons Act 1985*.

Walking rights on Dartmoor specifically arising from the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000*, extend to approximately 7,000 hectares.

Further access on foot has been made by agreement between the National Park Authority and a number of landowners/occupiers.

Generally, accessing Dartmoor's open country is relatively straightforward. However, because of the *Dartmoor Commons Act*, the open access situation on Dartmoor is different from that for the rest of the country. Understanding your rights and responsibilities associated with the different types of open access on Dartmoor is important for your enjoyment, for land and livestock management reasons, and for wildlife conservation.

And, by following the Countryside Code and Moor Care guidelines you will be helping to look after these outstanding areas.



The Dartmoor Commons

Most of Dartmoor's open moorland is common land, which is all owned, and subject to the rights of commoners. The most important right of common is the grazing of cattle, sheep and ponies. The vast areas of open country on north and south Dartmoor are mainly common land. There are also smaller areas of common land throughout the National Park, especially on the eastern side. The public has had a legal right of access on foot, and horseback, to these areas since 1985.

Generally, access to common land is unrestricted in terms of when you can visit. The exceptions to this are the MOD's Range Danger Areas on north Dartmoor - firing times must be checked when planning to walk in these areas (see page 16).

Please follow the *Dartmoor National Park Byelaws* when visiting the Dartmoor commons. Copies of the Byelaws are available from local Information Centres; or view them on-line at www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk

Access opportunities under the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000*



The *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000* (CRoW Act) created the right, in England and Wales, to walk over areas officially mapped as open country and registered common land. Access rights to Dartmoor's common land had previously been secured in 1985, and some mapped land is also covered by existing access agreements.

What you can do there

The CRoW Act rights cover most recreational activities carried out on foot, including walking, sightseeing, bird-watching, climbing and running. Dogs are generally welcome with their owners, but owners must be aware of when they have to keep their animals on leads and when specific exclusions are applied to dogs.

The right of open access is only for walkers but does not prevent people carrying out other lawful and customary activities. While you may enjoy a picnic, you may not light or cause a fire, feed any animals, leave litter or do any damage. Camping is not allowed without the express permission of the landowner.

The National Park Authority's Ranger Service has consulted with land managers to provide appropriate access points and associated signage to such land. For nature conservation and other land management reasons, please heed all signs.

Restrictions

Unlike the Dartmoor Commons and access agreement areas, access to land defined as CRoW Act 'open country' may be restricted.

There is no right of access at any time to 'excepted land', which includes buildings and private gardens, land within 20 metres from a dwelling or a building used for housing livestock (even though they may appear as access land on the Ordnance Survey and open access web site maps). Most land mapped as 'open country' is not 'excepted land', but access may be restricted in other ways. There are restrictions on the right of access which apply to all land, at all times. For example, you are not allowed to ride a bicycle or horse or to bring any animal other than a dog onto the access land. Throughout the months of March, April, May, June and July any dog must be kept on a short lead, and at all times when in the vicinity of livestock.

Access may be further restricted to safeguard heritage or wildlife interests, or for reasons of public safety.

These and similar restrictions might limit walkers to linear routes at certain times of the year, or temporarily exclude access with dogs from a field used for lambing. In exceptional circumstances walkers may even be excluded altogether. However, such restrictions, will be rare, and information will be made widely available.

Landowners also have the right to close their land for up to 28 days each year, without reason. The law does not require landowners to give more than several days' notice of such a closure. In some circumstances as little as 2 hours' notice is allowed. Whilst landowners are not expected to make widespread use of these restrictions, walkers must be aware that access may legitimately be denied, and at short notice. Anybody planning to walk on CRoW Act land will need

to check the most up to date information, to make sure that there has not been a last minute closure.

How do restrictions affect Rights of Way?

- Restrictions and closures of CRoW Act land will not affect rights of way over the land
- You can still use rights of way even if the surrounding land is closed or restricted -
- BUT you will have to stay on the line of the right of way.

How can you find out about restrictions and closures?

Information is available on the national web site
www.openaccess.gov.uk

Phone the
Open Access Contact Centre
(Mon - Fri, 9am - 5pm)
on 0845 100 3298

Visit a Dartmoor National
Park Authority Information
Centre.

Access Agreement areas

By agreement with landowners, the National Park Authority has secured public access to other areas of land. Please heed any notices and remember to abide by the *Dartmoor National Park Byelaws* which apply to most access agreement areas.

Permitted open country access

There are other areas in the National Park where the public has open access, for example Forestry Commission woodlands and some National Trust land. Local on the ground information is usually provided to help you identify and explore such areas.

Linear access

Public Rights of Way

There is a legal right to walk on footpaths, bridleways and byways (of which there are over 450 miles (730 km) within the National Park).

There are several types of public right of way:

- a footpath may be used for walking;
- a bridleway may be used for riding or leading a horse, as well as for walking. Cycling is also permitted, providing the cyclists give way to riders and pedestrians;
- a byway open to all traffic (usually called a 'byway') is used for walking, riding, leading a horse or cycling. There is also a right to use any kind of wheeled vehicle, including motor cars and horse-drawn vehicles.

Rights of way are recorded on the 'definitive map' kept by the highway authority, Devon County Council. They are also shown on Ordnance Survey Explorer and Landranger maps.

Permissive paths

Land managers may let you use some paths and tracks that are not public rights of way. These are called 'permissive paths'. You don't have a statutory right to use them and they are not covered by rights of way legislation. Often there will be a notice and/or waymarking at key access points. Many permitted paths will cross farmland - please heed appropriate signage.

Public access on Dartmoor

Dartmoor National Park Authority's role

On Dartmoor, the National Park Authority is largely responsible for managing access to open country and the rights of way network. It aims to help you make the most of your visit, and to ensure the landscape is protected, by providing signs, gates, stiles and information. It works closely with land managers and farmers, and in partnership with organisations making specialist use of the moorland, such as education

and conservation groups. It also promotes the use of public transport and opportunities for access for all.

Dartmoor Access Forum

This is a statutory and independent forum. Such Local Access Forums were set up through the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000*. It brings together the views of landowners, recreation users and other special interests. Dartmoor Access Forum (DAF) provides advice to the National Park Authority, and also to the local highway authority and government agencies, on all access and countryside recreation issues. The Forum comprises people drawn from a range of backgrounds including walking, climbing, cycling, riding, land owning, farming, conservation, education, rural businesses, and specialist or minority interests.

For information about the DAF contact
**localaccessforum@
dartmoor-npa.gov.uk**