

Directions

- 1 The walk starts from the lay by where parking is available. From here pass through a gate and take the track straight ahead for approximately 1 kilometre over moorland, keeping the field bank to your right. When you reach a gate across the track, go through the gate and the track turns immediately left, with the field bank to your left.
- 2 Carry on along the track and you will reach a group of trees to your right, and the ruins of **Larkbarrow Farm**. When you are ready to leave Larkbarrow, re-join the path and follow it through a gate so that the field bank is now upon your right, and to your left there is another low bank.
- 3 After a short distance a small square stone structure will be visible to the left. This is one of the outbuildings of **Larkbarrow Cottage**. Slightly further along is an uneven mound of rubble covered with grass, marking where the cottage once stood.
- 4 Continue along this path and you will eventually reach the ruins of **Tom's Hill Farm**. At this point there is the option to continue along the route or to make a slight detour to visit a sheep fold. To take the detour, follow the instructions in the white box, or continue to follow this route.
- 5 Take the indistinct path that heads downhill to the left



towards the river. Keep on the path across the river at a rough ford and up the other side of the valley to the gateway.

- 6 Once through the gateway, veer leftwards and you will see a field bank with the occasional hawthorn tree along it. You need to walk roughly parallel to the field bank and some 100-200 metres from it. This is rough moorland and care must be taken.
- 7 Gradually converge on the field bank as you start to climb gently uphill - you are aiming to converge with it at

the corner of the field in front of you.

- 8 When you reach the corner, you will see a gate through the field bank. Pass through the gate and immediately go through a second gate on the right in front of you and pass through another fieldbank onto the hill called Elsworth.
- 9 Once through the gate turn sharp left and keep the field bank on your left. Follow the bank around the hill, and you will find that you have good views back towards Larkbarrow. From this hillside observers watched the shelling of Larkbarrow Farm during **WWII**.
- 10 The field bank curves round the hillside and eventually you reach a gate through it. Just before this is the route of the intended **Porlock to Simonsbath Railway** visible as an earthwork.
- 11 Pass through the gate, and bear right down to the road at **Larkbarrow Corner**. Turn left onto the road and follow it back to the start point.
- 12 For the detour, keep to the main path and go through the gate in front of you (Edwards' Post). A light track goes into the valley towards the river. Follow this and it will take you to a bridge. Cross the bridge and go straight ahead. The **sheepfold** is now in front of you. To continue the walk follow the path back to Tom's Hill, go through the gate and take the path to your right down the hill towards the river. Continue from 5.

Further Reading:

The following contain further information on the historic landscape of Larkbarrow.

Roger A. Burton, *The Heritage of Exmoor*, 1989, Maslands Ltd. Tiverton

Hazel Riley & Robert Wilson-North, *The Field Archaeology of Exmoor*, 2001, English Heritage

Mary Siraut, *Exmoor: The making of an English Upland*, 2009, Phillimore & Co Ltd

Mary Siraut, *A Field Guide To The Royal Forest of Exmoor*, 2013, Exmoor National Park Authority

Elaine Jamieson, *Larkbarrow Farm, Exmoor, Somerset* 2001, English Heritage Report Series

Rob Wilson-North. *Larkbarrow Farm, Somerset. Interim Report on the archaeological excavations and other fieldwork 2008*

2010, Exmoor National Park Historic Environment Report Series No.3



Toilets & refreshments: None on route, nearest at Simonsbath or Lynmouth.

Dogs: Dogs should be kept under control at all times and between 1 March & 31 July should be kept on a short lead to minimise disturbance to livestock and ground nesting birds.

Access land: This walk is on access land which means that you can visit any part of it on foot, unless otherwise informed.

www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk
www.heartofexmoor.org.uk



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Colour photos by Nick Dawson



Exmoor Moorland Archaeology Walks Series No.1: Larkbarrow



Start point: Layby near Larkbarrow Corner

Start Grid Reference: SS 8275 4175

Distance: 4 miles (6 kilometres)

Level of difficulty: Moderate to strenuous. Some parts of the walk are across open moorland, so sturdy walking boots should be worn and this walk should not be attempted in poor weather.

Map: Ordnance Survey Explorer Map OL9 must be used in conjunction with this leaflet.

Trees providing shelter from the elements at Larkbarrow Farm



Exmoor's historic landscapes are a very rare survival, both within England and also across the British Isles. They contain many archaeological sites, ranging in date from early prehistory (some 8,000 years ago) to the 20th century. Together they offer a unique insight into our human past.



Larkbarrow 1954

for crops and to convey iron ore from Exmoor to the coast. Although the line itself was never laid, the track bed was cleared and prepared and is still visible, forming part of a bridleway today.

The Modern Landscape

The appearance of Larkbarrow and Tom's Hill farmsteads was dramatically altered as a result of their use during the **WWII** to train troops for the invasion of mainland Europe. Evidence for this military activity can be observed in the shell holes, slit trenches and in the bombed remains of the farmsteads, utilised for target practice.

A subtle but poignant monument in the Larkbarrow landscape is that to Malcolm MacEwen who has been described as a 'guru', along with his wife Ann, of the National Parks movement. He championed the concept of marrying sympathy for landscapes with an understanding of the needs of the people who make their living there. Malcolm MacEwen was a Member of the Exmoor National Park Committee from 1973 until 1981. He fought doggedly for the conservation of the National Park and was pivotal in the moves that led to Lord Porchester's *A Study of Exmoor* in 1977. This influential report made a major contribution to reducing the rate of loss of Exmoor's moorland and led to the introduction of management agreements as a mechanism for conservation.

The monument is built into the wall of the **sheepfold** at Pinford, near Tom's Hill. Malcolm MacEwen died on 11th May 1996. A second stone commemorates Guy Somerset who was Chairman of the Exmoor Society.



Circular sheepfold or 'stell'

The Historic Landscape

Today the landscape around Larkbarrow is one of open moorland, but 8,000 years ago, when Mesolithic hunter gatherers roamed across Exmoor, mixed woodland of native species such as oak and hazel covered the area. Glades and open spaces provided opportunities for hunter gatherer groups to stalk red deer and wild boar. Evidence for these people was found on the site of Larkbarrow Farm in 2008. Around 500 pieces of flint were collected during excavations, showing hunter gatherers spent time here making flint arrowheads and blades for hunting trips across this part of Exmoor.

Living in the Larkbarrow Landscape

Around 4000 years later, during the Bronze Age, people built the burial mound or 'barrow' near **Larkbarrow Corner** which gives the area its name. It was during this period that the moorland landscape we see today was formed; the result of deforestation to make way for a more settled way of life. At this time cairns, familiar across much of Exmoor, were built north of **Larkbarrow Farm**. These cairns (or 'barrows', if made of earth) were usually placed in prominent locations, and mark a burial or cremation. In the same area is a stone setting (a complex of standing stones) as well as individual standing stones. Stone settings are found in geometric shapes or in seemingly random patterns across the moorlands, but archaeologists have not yet been able to fully understand why they were built.

'Reclamation'

When the Royal Forest of Exmoor was sold in 1818 to John Knight, a Midlands industrialist, he began a process of 'reclamation', attempting to turn moorland into productive farmland. It was the largest enterprise of its kind, and remains a monument to Victorian aspiration. This period of Exmoor's history has fundamentally shaped the landscape at Larkbarrow, through the construction of **Larkbarrow and Tom's Hill Farms**. Not only were the farmsteads built, but quarries were dug, fields were laid out and peat was cut from the moor; also, a water meadow system was constructed on the hill opposite Larkbarrow Farm. It took ten years to find a tenant for Larkbarrow, and the tenancy was short lived. James Meadows arrived at Larkbarrow in 1850,

intending to graze dairy cows and produce cheese. When his dairying enterprise fell through in 1852, James Meadows left Larkbarrow and the Knights were unable to find another tenant for this remote moorland farm.

Larkbarrow began to fall into disrepair until the 1860s, when Frederic Knight, who was now running the estate for his father, began to bring Scottish lowland shepherds to graze their hardy black faced sheep on the lands of the former Royal Forest. Flocks introduced into this area were tended by shepherds and their families, installed at Larkbarrow and Tom's Hill. A **sheepfold** at Pinford, near Tom's Hill bears a considerable resemblance to those found in Scotland, known as 'stells'. It is thought to have been constructed at this time to give shelter to the sheep exposed to the often harsh moorland climate.

In the end Larkbarrow and Tom's Hill were unsuccessful endeavours. By the early 1900s Larkbarrow farmhouse had become a 'hunting and shooting box' (a retreat in wet weather), although **Larkbarrow Cottage** continued in use. It was here, in July 1923, that one of the occupants, Will Little, was struck by lightning and killed on his way home from haymaking at nearby Warren Farm.

Frederic Knight developed another ambitious plan as part of his reclamation attempts: to build a railway across the moorland between **Porlock and Simonsbath**, to transport lime to make the acidic moorland soils suitable



Ruins of outbuilding of Larkbarrow Cottage

Shelter belt of trees visible today around the remains of Larkbarrow Farm