

Military on Dartmoor



Dartmoor Factsheet

Introduction

The large wild open space that lies at the heart of Dartmoor has attracted the attention of different people over the ages. It is a fine place to graze livestock, many people went digging for tin ore, William the Conqueror declared it a royal hunting ground and later, in the 19th century, it became attractive for recreation. In addition, the remote, upland moorland and sometimes difficult weather has provided the military with a challenging environment for training for over 200 years. By 1951 the area was thought special enough to designate it a National Park. However, there are potential conflicts in some of today's land uses especially recreational use, conservation interests and military training use. This Factsheet looks at the apparent conflict between these uses and describes how this is managed.

Historical use of the moor by the military

Military training on Dartmoor began during the early 1800s with a marked increase during the Crimean War (1854-1856). Artillery training started in 1875 on the Duchy of Cornwall's moorland south of Okehampton with a permanent camp being built 20 years later. Since then, the size of military land holdings on Dartmoor has varied according to need. With the beginning of the Second World War, in 1939, nearly all of Dartmoor's open country was used intensively for tactical exercises, many of which involved the use of live ammunition. After the War a smaller area was required.



Military training on Dartmoor

Present day military use of Dartmoor

Today, Dartmoor continues to provide a broad spectrum of military training. The north moor contains 3 Training Areas: Okehampton, Willsworthy and Merrivale. These are used for navigation, survival, camping and other outdoor skills; for training where only blank ammunition is used (so-called dry tactical training); and for tactical training with live ammunition. For safety reasons it is only when live ammunition is being fired that areas (the Range Danger Areas) have to be closed to the public. There are also two 'dry training areas' on the south moor around Cramber Tor and Ringmoor. Here they do not use live ammunition, instead focussing on adventurous and tactical battle training.

The Training Areas are primarily used by the locally based Royal Marines and other forces based in the south west of England including the territorial and reserve forces and their cadet organisations. Units sometimes come from areas where they cannot do the type of training that Dartmoor offers. The ammunition used is limited to rifle, machine gun and mortars. Artillery may only be used to fire smoke, practice or illuminating shells.

Public access to the Training Areas

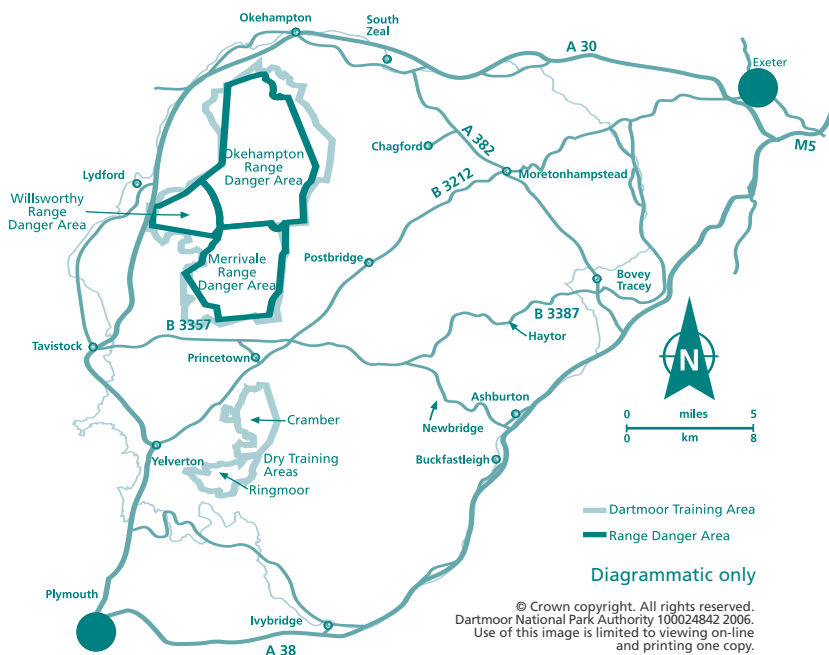
The *Dartmoor Commons Act 1985* allows the general public access on the common land by foot and on horseback.

Most of the Training Areas are on common land. The military welcomes public access to these Training Areas but for the public's safety Range Danger Areas are closed to the public when live firing is programmed. The Range boundaries are marked on the ground by red and white posts with warning notices and are also shown on some maps such as the Ordnance Survey Outdoor Leisure map for Dartmoor.

Warning signals (red flags by day or red lights by night) are hoisted on prominent physical features around each Range Danger Area to indicate that live firing is occurring. A number of lookout posts are also manned when live firing is taking place.

To help the public enjoy Dartmoor, the Range Danger Area boundaries and guaranteed public access dates are shown in a leaflet called *Dartmoor Military Ranges and Training Areas – A Guide to Walkers and Riders*, and on the web site www.dartmoor-ranges.co.uk Actual firing times are posted on that web site, in local Information Centres, local newspapers and announced on BBC Radio Devon. Firing times are also available on Freephone 0800 4 58 48.

Further information can be found in the booklet, *Walking on Dartmoor*, published by the National Park Authority.



Suspicious objects

The military has used the area for training since the early 1800s. Although the military regularly checks for military debris the public are advised not to touch any suspicious objects as they may be unexploded ordnance. Some of the older debris can be very corroded and rusty. Mark the area, note the location and inform the police (Tel: 08452 777444).

The National Park purposes and the impact of military activity

The twin purposes of National Parks as stated in the *Environment Act 1995* are:

- to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage, and
- to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the National Parks' special qualities by the public.

These purposes appear to conflict with military activity because live firing sometimes limits public access to core parts of the Dartmoor landscape. Military activity also causes visual intrusions, such as lookout posts, flagpoles, warning signs and roads and tracks that penetrate the remote wild country. Military activity can also disturb wildlife and damage archaeological remains. This has been considerably reduced since the use of high explosive artillery shells has ceased. Disturbance from noise and low flying aircraft can also affect the enjoyment of Dartmoor's special qualities.

National Park policies towards military activity

In May 2001 the Dartmoor National Park Authority published the *Dartmoor National Park Management Plan* in which it sets out a vision for Dartmoor, which includes that 'moorland is free from live firing'.* The general public were consulted on this vision and there were strong views expressed on both sides of the argument:

- 52% wanted live firing to stop
- 48% had no objection to it.

Reasons for supporting living firing

- ◆ national security
- ◆ can protect areas from disturbance
- ◆ it creates employment and provides local economic benefits
- ◆ it maintains a traditional use of Dartmoor

Reasons for stopping live firing

- ◆ it would improve public access to a core part of Dartmoor
- ◆ it would stop noise pollution
- ◆ it would reduce military damage and litter
- ◆ it would allow the removal of eyesores from the moor

* The Management Plan is currently being reviewed and new policies regarding military activity may arise.

The Dartmoor National Park Authority continues to press for the ultimate withdrawal of military activity damaging to National Park purposes as long as this is consistent with the Nation's defence needs.

In the meantime, the National Park Authority closely scrutinises the impacts (general and specific) of military activity on Dartmoor. It also works together with the military to minimise any impact on Dartmoor's special qualities and to maximise opportunities for public access.

Government policy

The Government recognises the conflict between military use and National Park purposes, but accepts that the training areas will be needed for the foreseeable future to ensure that the UK's armed forces 'achieve and maintain a national defence capability'. Government has instructed the two bodies (the Ministry of Defence and the Dartmoor National Park Authority) to work together at the local level to resolve potential conflict.



Military personnel, working with the National Park Authority, undertake a range of conservation and public access projects in the National Park

Working together

A public enquiry about the military use of Dartmoor was held in 1975 headed by Lady Sharp. In the final report, often referred to as the 'Sharp Report', she concluded that military live firing and National Parks do not fit well together. However, they need to find ways to work together as both were likely to have to coexist for a long time. The findings of this enquiry did influence Government policy and led to the establishment of the **Dartmoor Steering Group** and its **Working Party**.

The Dartmoor Steering Group has, for the last 25 years, sought to find a balance between the national military need and the National Park purposes. The Dartmoor Working Party undertakes the more *practical work* of dealing with complaints, monitoring the environment and doing conservation works.

Examples of joint working

- ◆ The National Park Authority has worked with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to completely review the rules governing the training on Dartmoor and also exchanges information with MoD staff about conservation.
- ◆ The MoD recognises its responsibility to support the National Park's purposes. In 2000 the Secretary of State for Defence published *In Trust and on Trust*. This national Defence Estate Strategy contains specific objectives for military cooperation with National Park Authorities.
- ◆ In 1999 the MoD published its Integrated Land Management Plan for Willsworthy with a contribution from the National Park Authority. This plan tries to bring together military training and environmental objectives; a group has been set up to hold regular meetings to sort out any problems.
- ◆ The MoD, advised by the National Park Authority and English Heritage, is conserving military structures, such as some look-outs and target railways, which over the course of time have become valued as historic features in their own right, and are now being looked after as part of Dartmoor's cultural heritage.
- ◆ Working together, the certainty and quality of public access has improved by better communication of guaranteed public access periods and the increase pre-notice period of firing times.

Dartmoor is not the only National Park in Britain where military activities take place - for example, live firing takes place in Northumberland National Park (Otterburn training area covers 23,500 hectares, or 23% of the National Park), in the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, and on part of the Peak District National Park. Adventurous training occurs in all Britain's National Parks.

In 2005 the Association of National Park Authorities and the Ministry of Defence confirmed a Declaration of Intent, which sets a framework for maintaining and improving working relationships between the two parties at national level, and relates to all military activities within the National Parks.

The Declaration encourages mutual respect, consultation and co-operation in order to achieve the best practicable integration of military requirements and National Park purposes. A Joint Liaison Committee presides over the commitments made by both parties in respect of practical management, the processing of development proposals, the provision of advice and public information, and environmental and access enhancement. On Dartmoor, these commitments are delivered effectively through both the Dartmoor Steering Group and the Dartmoor Working Party.

In conclusion, although the National Park Authority remains committed to the eventual withdrawal of military use where this is damaging to National Park purposes, the Dartmoor Steering Group and its Working Party are effective joint organizations for dealing with the issues caused by those military activities that may conflict with National Park purposes. These arrangements also help the Authority and the MoD to work together to secure opportunities for both conservation and public access.

The Dartmoor National Park Authority acknowledges the assistance given by the MoD in the preparation of this Factsheet. This Factsheet only aims to provide some general information, up to date as at the date of publication. Whilst every care has been taken to ensure accuracy, the Factsheet is not intended to be a definitive statement of the law or policy. Dartmoor National Park Authority and the Ministry of Defence cannot accept any responsibility for information that is found to be inaccurate, misleading, or out of date; nor for any loss or damage arising from the use of information in this Factsheet.

Useful links for further information:

For more detailed information about military training on Dartmoor please see: *Dartmoor and its military use: 2005 status*

Other factsheets:

- Dartmoor Commons
- Land Use Issues

Other information:

- *Military on Dartmoor* www.dartmoorsociety.com
- *Military Training and National Parks: a Conflict of Principle (dated August 2003)* www.cnp.org.uk
- Dartmoor Training Area firing programme or Armed Forces' interest in Dartmoor www.dartmoor-ranges.co.uk or contact Commandant, Dartmoor Training Area, Okehampton Camp, Okehampton EX20 1QP Tel: (01837) 650010

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

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