

Bellever Audio Walk Transcript

Peter Nash – Presenter

Jackie Ridley, Sustainable Tourism Officer, Dartmoor National Park Authority

Jane Marchand, Archaeologist, Dartmoor National Park Authority

Dru Butterfield, Manager, Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust

Track One – Introduction

Postbridge Information Centre (Grid reference SX 646 789)

Hello and welcome to Dartmoor National Park and this audio walk from Postbridge pretty much in the centre of the park in to Bellever forest, which promises to be a fascinating walk, with a lot of prehistoric remains to be explored.

We are starting off at the Information Centre in the Postbridge car park, and as with all Dartmoor National Park Authority audio walks, we have divided this audio tour in to several sections, each one being a separate track for you to download on to your player. That way you can simply switch off when you are walking and then start playing the new track at the next point of interest, and I will give you full directions when to do this on the audio itself. You will also find that the name of each track include the grid reference of where you should be, so that you can follow the tour using a standard Ordnance Survey map, Explorer OL28 for Dartmoor, in this case, or you can download the accompanying map so you have a back up to the instructions on the audio.

Today's walk is a circular one, beginning and ending at the Information Centre, taking us out of Postbridge to the south and in to Bellever forest, and then Krap's Ring, a large enclosure of hut rings and then onward to Lakehead Hill. From there we will head southwards passing various historic remains, and climbing to Bellever Tor, considered the very centre point of Dartmoor, with panoramic views including, among other things, Dartmoor Prison.

Then we continue southerly, down hill again to the charmingly named, Laughter Tor. Crossing a number of rather interesting artefacts of a bygone age, including the Sheep Count, which I would be fascinated to find out exactly what that is. Continuing on then, past a large standing stone, and in to Bellever Forest once more, through a gate and passing Laughter Hole Farm, from here it's on to a stop at Bellever woods for a tea break, and possibly even a paddle, to see a splendid example of a clapper bridge. We head back towards Postbridge, which of course is famous for its own clapper bridge, crossing the road back in to the Information Centre car park where we started.

As always let make sure we have sturdy boots as the terrain is a bit uneven and quite boggy in several areas along this walk. A walking stick or pole would also be very useful and take a waterproof coat, and suncream as you can never be too sure with Dartmoor's changeable weather. The walk is

approximately 6 miles, that's 10 kilometers, so best to allow 3 ½ hours or so, that way you can really appreciate your surroundings here.

Joining us on this walk is Jackie Ridley, Dartmoor National Park Authority's Sustainable Tourism Officer and we have met here just outside the Information Centre in Postbridge car park; Jackie – very much a forest walk, this one?

Jackie - Hi Peter, yes it's got a mixture actually, a lovely forest walk which is ideal if the weather's not too good, it gives you a bit of shelter, but you also get out on the moor and see some fabulous views and get treated with the riverside stop as well.

Peter - Now just before we set off, a word about maps, pretty essential if you're walking on Dartmoor. Mine is an Ordnance Survey Explorer OL28, entitled quite simply, DARTMOOR, and Jackie you're bringing with you the map downloaded from the website that accompanies the audio, or you can pick up a copy from the Postbridge Information Centre. The grid reference of the Information Centre is SX646788. And I think I am right in saying we are heading south east?

Jackie - Probably south, so if we go out of the car park and turn right, and just walk a short way up the road and then we will cross over the road, take care with the traffic, and you will see a cattle grid and a wooden gate, go through the wooden gate you will see a main road ahead of you, we don't want that, we want to turn right and then out of three tracks, we take the left track, which is a hard track actually used by the forestry vehicles and then we will head up there, only a short distance (maybe a few minutes walk), until we come across another hard track going off on our right. Follow that for another short while and then there will be a newly cut muddy track on the left and that takes us straight to Krap's Ring you will see it because the track will run out and go out on to grass and you know you are at the right place then.

Peter - That's where we are going to rendezvous grid ref SX644 781. So let's get going, Jackie you lead the way. Now there are a number of stops on this audio tour so the best thing to do is to switch off now and enjoy the walk and we will see you at our first stop at Krap's Ring, switch on again then and we will give you a bit more information.

Track Two – Krap's Ring (Grid reference SX 644 781)

Peter - So we are coming to the end of this relatively recent path I think it's fair to say, in these trees, and the trees actually end and if you look around, you have to use your imagination a little bit, you can see quite a large circle of fairly sparsely spaced out granite boulders covered in lichen and mosses and this is in fact Krap's Ring.

Jackie - That's right, I think there's eleven settlements here. We are going to meet up with Dartmoor National Park Authority's Archaeologist, Jane Marchand, to tell us a bit more about this site.

Peter - I can see her at the top there, sat in amongst various rocks which I assume are hut circles, one which we are just passing now with a white stick in the middle, which look sfairly official. Jane Hello.

Jane – Hello.

Peter - How are you?

Jane - I'm fine, thank you.

Peter - Well it's a lovely day, which in many ways is perfect for walking. You are an archaeologist for the National Park Authority and you're working up here today?

Jane - Yes, I'm just having a walk around, checking everything is in order

Peter - So how old is this? I take it, it's Bronze Age, which is 3500 years?

Jane - It's about 3500 years ago, it's difficult to know because the Bronze Age actually went on for a long period, so we think these huts were probably occupied 1500BC.

Peter - We are actually in a bigger circle, there are hut circles within this larger circle of granite boulders around, so this was a settlement of several houses I should imagine?

Jane - I think originally there were about 15 houses now there are 11 that remain, they have all been quarried for their stone unfortunately, and the one with the white post is probably the best surviving example. They are set within this magnificent enclosure wall which again has spread all over the place, but when it was originally built it must have been quite impressive, it was wide and tall.

Peter - And it would have been contiguous all the way around?

Jane - Yes completely enclosed this settlement.

Peter - And how tall do you think this would have been?

Jane - Between a meter to a meter and a half about 2 meters wide.

Peter - And I guess a lot of this is conjecture.

Jane - Oh it is, absolutely, that's the wonderful thing about archaeology!

Peter - There are no pictures of course.

Jane - No they didn't leave any plans unfortunately.

Peter - Now we are in what is clearly planted woodland, which is forestry commission, what do you think were here 3500 years ago when the people were living here?

Jane - I think we are just above the original tree line. Most of Dartmoor's hut circles are on about 300 meter contours, which makes you think the trees have been cleared to just below that, so the trees are along all the valley areas.

Peter - And it probably would have been oak woodland?

Jane - Yes it would have.

Peter - And the question has to be asked, what were people doing here?

Jane - They were probably farming, but in this particular instance there is no evidence of field systems, so they weren't in to arable farming, they were pastoralists. Possibly due to the size of this enclosure there is a lot of space here which hasn't got any hut circles so they were probably growing a small amount of their own supplies. The other thing you have to remember when you're standing in somewhere like this, where you only have hut circles taking up a quarter of it, there would probably be timber buildings as well, that we have lost all traces of, which makes it really difficult to estimate the population of somewhere like this.

Peter - What about burial mounds?

Jane - We are going on to those which is why Bellever is so nice, because we have two discrete areas. We have got the settlements just on the lower slopes and we walk up to the top of Lakehead Hill it really feels like a sacred area, it's all burials and stone rows.

Peter – Let's take a closer look, if we can, to the circle in the middle. I would say, the bigger circle, white stick in the middle of it, this is a house right?

Jane - This is a house; well, we assume it is a house. We don't know that they are all houses, probably some were craft places, perhaps stores, perhaps places where they brought young animals in, things like that.

Peter – It's all covered in grass, we got probably 20 to 30 bits of granite and lichen and mosses growing over it in a dip covered in grass, do you think this was partly timber partly granite?

Jane - I think the walls were probably all granite, the roof was held upright of timber posts, there would have been a central post to support the roof and an inner ring of posts also supporting.

Peter - And again conjecture of course, but do you think this would have been the boss's place?

Jane - Actually no I don't, because we are going to look at a really nice one just over there.

Peter - Further up the hill?

Jane - It looks as if it would have been the headman's house, away from the rest, it's very much more substantial.

Peter - So if we leave the white post behind, heading up the hill sort of south easterly really, there is a tree right in front of us and another one behind us, probably a maximum 100m – it looks like a Rowan tree. So let's walk on up there, we will see you in a few minutes.

Peter – Okay Jane, we have walked a very short distance actually, here's the tree, leaning to one side, presumably blown by the wind and it's right on the edge of a circle, what is very clearly a circle and this is probably the grandees house, do you think?

Jane - Well that's what I imagine it is, the fact it is set outside the enclosure and having a look at the one inside you can see that this is a much larger enclosure maybe this is where the headman was.

Peter - Looking down on his people!

Jane - We could be entirely wrong, this could be something much earlier and then they built that, that's the wonderful thing about archaeology really!

Peter - I suppose we don't really know do we?

Jane - Unless we excavated and got some dates.

Peter - Do you have any plans to excavate these?

Jane - Not this particular settlement, but we do have an on going excavation just the other side of Lakehead Hill, on a round house that was badly damaged by falling trees about 2 years ago. We will be excavating that again, end of July, beginning of August (2009), and it should be exciting. It's already produced a number of very interesting results.

Peter - And can we get any more information about that?

Jane - It will be on our website and there will be a press release, there's something call National Archaeology Week and we are coinciding with that - there will be a lot of publicity.

Peter- Okay, well Jane from here, which way shall we head?

Jane - I think we shall continue walking southwards over Lakehead Hill.

Jackie - The easiest way is just to keep the forestry block on your right hand side and head up hill.

Peter - We will be heading to a grid reference at Lakehead Hill SX644 777 and how long do you think that will take from here Jackie?

Jackie - No more than 10 minutes I would have thought.

Peter – Okay, let's switch off now, and we will see you up at Lakehead Hill.

Track Three – Lakehead Hill (Grid reference SX 644 777)

Peter – Well, as we walk up now to the top of Lakehead Hill, I can hear a Skylark there, a very beautiful sound. We have got a post with a label that says 10A on it, Jane any idea what this is?

Jane – It's to identify that we are actually at an archaeological site, this is the beginning of the burial area at Lakehead Hill and this is actually a burial mound. We have got an assortment of burial up here. This is called a curb circle as the stones are touching each other. What we don't know, is what the central burial was. We are going to go on and look at some cist stones which are these stone chests - whether there was one of those here, again the stone has gone for walling, we don't know.

Peter - Do we think someone important would have been buried here?

Jane - Yes I think given the scarcity of the burial mounds, compared to the number of hut circles we think that these kind of burials were reserved for the important people in the community.

Peter - Everyone else was just scattered to the four winds.

Jane - I think so yes, absolutely and the other thing we don't know is whether there was just one burial or whether it was opened up again and other people were put in.

Peter - Well it's beautiful, certainly the Skylarks are loving it here.

Jane - Absolutely and if you take in the view it is stunning.

Jackie – It's fantastic isn't it.

Peter - Now Jane and Jackie, we are heading towards Bellever Tor. But we are going to stop en route, if we can see them, a stone row, about 100 metres or so from here Jane?

Jane - I should think so yes.

Peter - We just follow this path, I don't think we can miss it. I think from up there we will actually see Bellever Tor. So let's go up there and explore the stone row a little bit.

Peter - And here we are at what is very much a stone row, it's east – westerly line, more or less, I would have thought, Of about a dozen granite rocks sticking up and another post just to its left. Right in front of us, there is, I assume, Bellever Tor, is that right Jackie?

Jackie - Easy to spot, you've got the tree line on your right hand side and the very prominent Tors right in front of you.

Peter - So we can't get lost here, but Jane, you think we should head to the left slightly.

Jane - I think we should, we can't miss this stone row, it's one of four surviving stone rows in this area, but I think the most impressive one is just over to the east.

Peter - Really you can ramble around at your leisure up here, as long as you keep Bellever Tor in front of you, so whatever you do up here, that's the next stop.

Jackie - That's right, if you are interested in archaeology it would be great to join one of the guided walks the National Park put on.

Peter - And you can get information about that at the Information Centre where we started the walk?

Jackie - That's right, from Postbridge Information Centre; the walks can start from there. We have the Dartmoor Visitor newspaper which has the guided walks in it, as well as on the website.

Peter - The wind's getting up a little bit here as we reach the brow of this hill and I can see a pile of quite large granite slabs is this, is this a kistvaen?

Jane - This is a Kistvaen, actually means stone chest. And it's another form of burial monument, it's just really like a stone coffin. It was used for inhumations; the larger ones where the body lies, the smaller ones were for cremated bones.

Peter - There's no evidence of bones here because the acidic soil would have taken them away.

Jane - They have long since gone.

Peter - And a post here with 14A and 15A on it and a stile. Now, you don't want to come here in the fog do you, there is a metal wire fence in front of you, you could walk into that if you're not paying attention! But there is a little stile to jump over, shall we go over there and have a look at the kistvaen? We have got a huge granite slab probably a metre and a half squared, held up probably by three, four, five, six vertical slabs, again, almost a metre across, and inside is a very cosy little space for a body presumably?

Jane - Yes, because of the size of it, it would have been a body in the foetal position.

Peter - People may have been a bit shorter 3,500 years ago, but you wouldn't get anyone more than about 4-5ft.

Jane - I think you would have to squash them up a bit, to get them in there. The thing about this is that it was heavily restored in 19th Century, and the antiquaries that found it, described finding this pile of stones, so they went about putting it back how they thought it was.

Peter - So they used their imagination a little bit.

Jane - All the Kists that survive on Dartmoor are below the ground, so this shouldn't be standing proud like this, you would have just seen the lid. And also the stone row, like the stone row back there, most of the sites have stone rows running up to them. This one is a bit wonky, we have about 75 stone rows on Dartmoor, their unifying trait is their linearity. This one isn't very straight; it goes off, as you can see, at quite an angle. But I have to say if they hadn't done it, it would have gone - so I'm not being critical at all, thank goodness they did it. And just while we are here, if you look around to all the heights most of them have got pimples on the top, which are actually burial cairns, so it was obviously the way of honouring your dead was to place them on the highest point so everyone can see them.

Peter - So let's head to Bellever Tor itself, we will rendezvous in the foot hills of it, and as we start to climb, we will be meeting somebody else there.

Jackie – Yes, we will be meeting Dru Butterfield, Manager of the Dartmoor Heritage Pony Trust, and she will be telling us about a very important programme that the Dartmoor Ponies are being used for - about the grazing around Bellever and how important that links with the archaeology

Peter - The Tor itself is grid reference SX644 764 should you get lost we will meet up there. So let's switch off now and we will see you at the foothills.

Track Four – Bellever Tor (Grid reference SX 644 764)

Peter – Okay, well we are in the dip looking up at Bellever Tor now and here is Dru, I presume?

ALL – Hi.

Peter - You're wearing a sweatshirt which says Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust on it.

Dru - That's right yes; we are a registered charity which leases this land from the Forestry Commission.

Peter - What exactly is a Dartmoor Pony?

Dru - We have two types of Dartmoor pony, we have the indigenous Dartmoor animal which was born and bred here, and bred for centuries, down through generations of Dartmoor pony keepers, and they share the same ancestors to those who went off to create the registered pony breed, the pedigree Dartmoor ponies, which you will see in the show rings. You have some remaining herds on Dartmoor that we are keen to preserve. So how do you know what a Dartmoor pony is? Well, what you're looking for is an animal which is plain in colour, normally bay which is a brown colour, they can be black, they can be grey, chestnut or roan, which is a gingery colour with flecks of white in it.

Peter - And they are not very tall are they ?

Dru – No, we are looking at a maximum of 127cm to the wither, so they are seen as the ideal child's riding pony. Also we use them extensively for conservation grazing, they are used to look after habitats and that's exactly the job they do here on Bellever.

Peter - Who owns these Dartmoor ponies?

Dru - The ponies on Dartmoor are owned by individual pony keepers. They all have commoner's rights and these rights are registered with the Commoner's Council, so they are allowed to run stock on the moor. The Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust doesn't have any commoner's rights, so to secure the future of the ponies we have to work with the pony keepers. And on Bellever we actually use this as a maturing site for pure bred Dartmoor ponies. They come here about 2 years old and they will stay on the site until they are between 4-5, when they become a more valuable age for riding and being able to take off and break them. It is a superb site to mature them and they come and do a really important job which is grazing this fantastic habitat. They are good at grazing the purple moor grass (the molinia), this tough rank grass, ponies will eat for anything up to 18 hours a day. They basically eat, sleep and eat!

Peter - Now I have to say I can't see any today!

Dru - They are hiding; this is why we call one of our walks "In Search of the Dartmoor Pony".

Peter - A little bit like whale watching I should think, you could spend all day looking and not see one.

Dru - Well isn't that the exciting thing, imagine how you will feel when you do see one!

Peter - So Dru, am I right in saying that the Dartmoor pony comes from the quarrying and the mining up here?

Dru - No, you can trace horses, or equines, going back some 3500 years. Obviously we can trace the pony back several centuries to when it was first recorded, which was sometime in the 1300s by Bishop Athwold of Crediton where he first mentioned the Dartmoor pony.

Peter - Now having said that it's an easy walk, it's getting a bit little more steep as we get up there, Jane on our right hand side we can see this white circle, what is it?

Jane - It is another enclosure, similar to Krap's Ring, and I am glad you have noticed it as it has recently been revealed. We have had a group of very hardy volunteers working out here for about four years, slowly revealing the stones, which for many years have lain hidden under the bilberry. As you walk up from Lakehead Hill, it immediately catches your eye now because the stones stand out as they really are quite bleached. And within this enclosure, it's quite interesting, it's what we call a rosette type and you can actually see where they have expanded it over time as the community presumably grew.

Peter - There really are a number of prehistoric dwellings to discover here, I guess you are going to find more aren't you?

Jane - Hopefully, yes, I think there are probably a lot hidden under the trees.

Peter - Well let's continue up to the top of Bellever Tor. I am lagging behind a little bit now, as it is getting a little steeper, so lets rendezvous at the top.

Peter - Right, we are just approaching the top of Bellever Tor and there is a trig point by the looks of things. Bellever Tor itself, a very stratified rock, very weathered as well and I think the sun is just beginning to push its way through as we reach the very top and go between two tall bits of the tor, here we are.

Jackie - What a lovely vista.

Peter - Look at that, it goes on and on and on.

Jackie – It's just amazing isn't it, you can clamber up to the top, up to the trig point and appreciate it even more, but here is just lovely. Good place for a coffee stop I think.

Peter - What a good Idea. Dru are you going to continue with us, or are you going to head back?

Dru - I'm going to keep searching for ponies, I feel as if I have built it up, so I think I should find some! This brings me on to an important point, we have a number of gateways throughout Bellever, every gate has a sign saying please keep the gate shut, if you ever see a gate that has been propped open, please shut it. It hasn't been left open by us, we need to keep the gate shut at all times, also it keeps stallions out of the reserve and keep our ponies in. I will see you soon.

Peter - Now, stumbling in the wind which has got up, I think it's time to open up the flask and have some coffee before we head to Laughter Tor, which is not that far away, directly to our east isn't it?

Jackie - And when we leave here, it is a nice straight-forward route to find it. We go down from the trig point down a well worn track, down the hill to an enclosure wall, and there is a gate there, which you go through and there are quite a few different paths up to Laughter Tor, so just make your way up to the crest.

Peter - We can see them all from here actually so we can't get lost. And Laughter Tor incidentally is grid reference SX652 757. So let's get down out of the wind and start heading in that direction - it's certainly getting up isn't it, but the sun is also trying to get out, it is the changeable weather of Dartmoor. Jane you are leaving us here, aren't you?

Jane - I am sadly, yes.

Peter – Well, it's been fascinating, there is so much pre-history.

Jane - Absolutely there is, you could spend a day admiring the prehistory really.

Peter - Well it's been fascinating walking with you, an expert on the subject. We will leave you here as we head up to Laughter Tor, so switch off now and we will see you up there.

Track Five – Laughter Tor (Grid reference SX 652 757)

Peter - Okay, well it is no Laughing matter; we are here at Laughter Tor! It didn't look very steep at all from where we were at Bellever Tor, but coming round the right hand side of it, we have snailed up, it's actually a little steeper than you think it is. It's mainly the grass, it's quite hefty.

Jackie - That's right, it's quite tussocky grass, kept that way, probably by the ponies as well. It's quite a bit of an incline, where as when we were at Bellever Tor, which is that bit higher, this looked fairly low-lying.

Peter: Now we have also passed on the right hand side of the a square enclosure any idea what this could be?

Jackie – Well that's the Sheep Count, for gathering stock in, sheep in particular. They would gather them together and get them in to that pen and when that pen was full, you would know you had all your sheep in and that's how many there were. It's a very distinctive, almost square, stone wall enclosure. Once you have that on your right hand side, just follow the path around up to the summit and you can look back at Bellever Tor and the route we have taken from Postbridge. It's very clear – across the trees and the clearing, and you will also see in the nearer distance, a dry stone wall in front of us there and we will be heading down to that dry stone wall and turning right, following it down hill, so keeping it to your left. Keep going until you see another wall, which is coming across in front of you and there will be a gate clearing to go through, go through that, keeping the wall to your left, and you come down and see a sign post and that's where we will need to meet next.

Peter - The grid reference where we are going to meet is SX 657 756. As usual, we will turn off now and see you when we get to the gate.

Track Six – Gateway (Grid reference SX 657 756)

Peter – Now, we have arrived at the gate and there is a signpost pointing in three different directions - the one we are interested in is Public Bridlepath - Bellever, and this gate with a blue dot on it, which takes us into the forest and we are going to be heading to Laughter Hole Farm and to do that I think we need to take a right fork up in front of us - it opens out slightly and there is a right fork there. So we walk down to Laughter Hole Farm and the grid reference is SX658 758. So, we are now in the forest aren't we?

Jackie - There is a track to the left, which goes up hill - we don't want that one. Just go straight ahead and it goes down hill.

Peter – Well, switch off now and we will rendezvous at the Farm.

Track Seven – Laughter Hole Farm (Grid reference SX 658 758)

Peter - Now here is Laughter Hole Farm, rather strange names around here aren't there!

Jackie - There are. The old venacular name for the many features in the area is "loughtor", which has since been mutated back in to "laughter".

Peter - What an amazing place to have a farm.

Jackie - It's a wonderful setting isn't it and peaceful, with those great big views.

Peter - These buildings, beautiful as they are, weren't originally here were they?

Jackie - The site of Laughter Hole Farm was originally lower down the valley. Going back to about 1733, the bungalow that you now see, that was late 18th century. There is a story going back to Christmas Day 1923, when the Stevens family, who were the owners of the farm at that point, said that the whole house began to shake and many of the decorations fell down - the pictures on the wall were swinging around and it actually transpired to be an earthquake tremor, which affected much of southern and central Dartmoor. So it just goes to show that it can happen anywhere.

Peter - It can happen anywhere, any time.

Jackie - We will just follow the lane all the way down to the river and Bellever, the car park there. I think that will make an excellent lunch stop – it's so pretty down there, and you've got all your amenities there as well.

Peter - You can't get lost because you follow this path, but in case you do, the grid reference is SX656 771, so just follow the path until we get there.

Track Eight – Picnic Area (Grid reference SX 656 771)

Peter - Now then, here we are by the most picturesque river you can imagine. It's stunning isn't it?

Jackie - It's so pretty. It's really gentle today, just seeing the nice rocks peaking through and then you have got the grass banks. This is just such an ideal place for recreation - great for all the generations; the kids can go paddling and if you have got elderly relatives that aren't as able, you can drive up as there is a car park and toilets here, and a short stroll and a hard track, so if anyone has a wheel chair they can get them here as well - and then you can all enjoy this area together. It really is perfect. What I would like to say, is how fabulous Bellever is for recreation; walking and cycling. And if you pass the toilets/comfort stop on your way from Laughter Hole Farm, you can come down that track, there is a map on there that shows some of the circular routes that can be done within Bellever Woods as well. Also Dartmoor National Park Authority has a children's club called Ranger Ralph, there is actually a cycle route that the kids can lead the parents on, so that's quite fun!

Peter – And you can get to that from the website?

Jackie – Yes, on Dartmoor National Park's website. You can find out under Kid's Zone (Fun Zone) all about Ranger Ralph.

Peter - As it is such a picture-perfect place, I think we should stop for a cup of tea and a sandwich and then we will be heading on to the Clapper Bridge here at Bellever, which I can just see poking through the trees.

Jackie - That's right, with the river just in front of you, if you head up river - so turn left and walk to the end, you will see remnants of the old clapper bridge and the road bridge just beyond it, and get directions for the next leg.

Peter - Well the grid reference for the next part is SX658 773 and we will rendezvous just by the bridge.

Track Nine – Bellever Clapper Bridge (Grid reference SX 658 773)

Peter - We have had a very nice lunch by the river, which was quite beautiful. We have now arrived at the clapper bridge.

Jackie - A very distinctive clapper bridge, not as complete as the one at Postbridge, but lovely all the same, and at the back of that is the humpback road bridge. This would have been the route of the Lych Way, which is where they used to take the coffins for the poor old inhabitants of central Dartmoor, over to the church at Lydford. The Lych Way runs east – west, so from Bellever, it would have gone past Lakehead Hill, where we were earlier, all the way across the moor to Lydford.

Peter - What a nice way to go – if you've got to go anyway!

Jackie - Quite a trek mind.

Peter - And we are turning left, back towards Postbridge, but to our right there are a dozen white cottages.

Jackie - This is the hamlet of Bellever and these cottages were originally used to house the employees of the Forestry Commission - forestry workers. Looks like a nice little setting doesn't it. There a Youth Hostel up here as well, so that makes an idea location for people who want to come down to Dartmoor and be right in the thick of things.

Peter - Wow, what a beautiful place to come.

Jackie - So I think the best thing for us to do is follow this road, watching out for any traffic and always go over to the grass verge as and when you need to. Once we get to the Youth Hostel, we will be cutting across, but I will give you more directions then.

Peter - So let's meet at the Youth Hostel then shall we?

Jackie - With the Youth Hostel on our left, we have a cattle grid and a five bar gate, we will go through the gate, sticking to the road, it will go up hill. You can stay on this road all the way back to Postbridge Information Centre, just crossing the road right at the end. Or, as I would recommend, we will take a diversion off across the grass and head down towards Postbridge clapper bridge.

Peter - And how far away is that from here do you think?

Jackie - About a five minute walk.

Peter – See you in about five minutes.

Peter – Well, the road is climbing up a bit now - we are by a slow sign - for the traffic that is, not for us! And just to the right, we are going to go a bit further

up hill, and there is a little blue public bridleway sign and that's the way we are heading?

Jackie - Yes we've come up the hill and passed a grey phone box - you don't see many of those - and on our right, you see this slow sign and there is a well worn track leading off to the right. Just pick your way through that, either staying parallel to the road, or slightly more inland if you like. Probably best to stay parallel I think, then you know you are going in the right direction. And, you'll never guess what, but I can see some ponies up ahead!

Peter - Typical! So they do exist. Now, as we head up here, we keep the forest to our left, very tall straight trees here. Now we haven't talked very much about that seeing we have walked in and out and around the forest. Now this is Forestry Commission land, is that right?

Jackie - Yes.

Peter - Now you refer to these as blocks of trees as we have looked back on them from the various Tors, and they are very blocky, clearly man-made obviously and man-designed. They date back, to the First or Second World War?

Jackie - Well the end of the First World War, there was only about 5% of Britain covered by trees, so it was a strategic reserve of timber that they needed to build up, so that was why they wanted to start some forestry blocks and have them as more commercial enterprises.

Peter - And I guess it wasn't particularly good land for agriculture at the time, for anything else?

Jackie - No, not really. It is a bit harsh at times, but it does seem to suit these trees, which are Sitka Spruce. The Forestry Commission has certainly had a change of direction in recent years - whereas before, it was just commercial forestry, now they are trying to do more on the recreation side. The recreation is one side, but also it's been very useful in preserving the archaeology that was already there, as well as now with their policy of having some other types of trees in helping with the biodiversity of the area as well.

Peter - (Puffing slightly) This is getting harder work now, going up the hill. And we're going to be next meeting at the clapper bridge at Postbridge.

Jackie - So basically we just walk, keeping the road on our left, nice and parallel, but we will have to bear inland a bit to our right, so that we can see the river and drop down to the clapper bridge. The route we are taking is nice and easy, but it can get wet and muddy over here, and also as we approach the river we have to go down some very steep steps - if you have got a walking pole, that's the time to use it.

Peter - The grid reference at the clapper bridge is SX 648 789, so let's switch off now and rendezvous there.

Track Ten – Postbridge Clapper Bridge (Grid reference SX 648 789)

Peter – Well, we have come down some very steep steps. We are at the clapper bridge, the river is on our right hand side - that's the East Dart River and here is this very classic, very beautiful bridge. Again, there are two bridges, one you can probably hear the cars going over, and this one in front of it.

Jackie – Yes, this is probably the finest example of a clapper bridge on Dartmoor, it's absolutely perfect isn't it? That would have been the old crossing point for the cattle as they were taking them to market.

Peter - So what we have got here is a bridge that spans the river with two columns in the middle that are made of granite blocks and over the top, we have got three huge great slabs of granite.

Jackie – Yes, just making best use of the local materials - a very solidly built bridge. Originally, there would have been stepping stones, or a fording point, but this river can get very, very deep. It's wonderfully preserved and again, it's a real honey pot attraction, because it is so accessible from Postbridge Information Centre car park and you can either walk across it, or sit on it, or sit by the river bank and have a picnic - it really is very popular.

Peter - Yes indeed, and there are people doing just that - having a picnic to one side. The water itself looks extremely clear.

Jackie - It is, it's lovely.

Peter - You want to drink it, or at least paddle in it, after quite a long walk, I am tempted to do just that.

Jackie – Well, I won't stop you!

Peter - Might be a bit nippy today, but perhaps in the middle of the summer. Now to get back to the Information Centre, we just have to cross this road – it's just to the left. There is a little shop there with provisions if you need to replenish and just beyond that is the Information Centre.

Jackie - You can always pop in to the Information Centre for anything you have enjoyed on the walk and you want to know a bit more about, like a guided walk on archaeology, or one of the Pony Heritage Trust walks. Just pop in there and the Information Staff will be really happy to help you.

Peter - Thank you very much for your time today Jackie, it's been a fabulous walk.

Jackie – You're really welcome, I've thoroughly enjoyed it.

Peter - Thank you for listening to this Dartmoor National Park audio tour. You can get more information from the Information Centres and from the website.

Jackie - That's www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk and there is also the Dartmoor.co.uk website, and you can download one of the series of our audio walks, there are ones at Postbridge, Haytor, Princetown and now Bellever.