



All of us at *Active Dartmoor* are keen to encourage people, of all abilities, to enjoy Dartmoor. So when Devon Cycle Hire, offered to tell me how they could accommodate a whole range of disabilities and let me have a bike for the morning, I jumped at the chance.

# Cycling for All

Written by David Guiterman



**T**hey explained that adapting a bike is usually no problem. There are four controls: two breaks and two gear levers, each of which can be positioned to accommodate most disabilities. It is perfectly possible to ride one-handed. Devon Cycle Hire is right next to the Granite way. This was once part of the Southern Region railway and has been converted into an all-weather track for cycles, horses and pedestrians. Unlike many roads, this track has no sign of a pothole anywhere. As the gradients are shallow, it is possible to cycle safely using only one brake — preferably the rear one. For those with more severe difficulties, tandems are available. There is no need either to put any power into pedalling or to steer; just leave all that effort to your partner in front and enjoy the experience and the magnificent views. If you need more extensive modifications to the bike it would be best to contact Devon Cycle Hire beforehand so as to explain your needs.

It was now time to jump aboard a very modern, well-maintained bike and experience the Granite way for myself. At first, I was a little nervous as it was many years ago when I last took to two wheels. Away I went; Whoops! A bit of a wobble and then, steady as she goes. The first section is all downhill so I could take in the wonderful views before having to do any really serious pedalling. Off to the left, the Sun was lighting up Sourton Tors: a series of outcrops composed not of granite, as one might expect on Dartmoor, but of sedimentary rock, heated and hardened by the once-molten granite. Rock like this is so hard that it is quarried at Meldon for road-building and as railway ballast.

Then it was on, effortlessly, downhill to Lake Viaduct and a stop to take in the panoramic views on either side. This granite viaduct was built in 1874 and then widened in 1878 to take an additional line. If you look carefully you can see the join. Lake? So where's the water then? Not a drop to be seen. Visitors soon find that, on Dartmoor, 'Lake' often refers to a very small





stream. This narrow, steep-sided dry valley coming down to Lake Viaduct was once a copper mine. Time to get off and enjoy the view. It was at that point that I realised the significance of not having been on a bike for a long time — time enough for joints to have become stiff. My leg couldn't quite make it over the crossbar and,

ignominiously, the bike and I changed our relative positions. Getting out from underneath, I made a mental note that next time I shall ask for a lady's bike: no crossbar, so no problem.

Onwards and downwards. Looking to the left you can see, just over a mile away, Brat Tor which is easily identified by the large Widgery Cross, erected by William Widgery, the Dartmoor artist, to commemorate Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1887. You might just be able to make it out in the photograph. This cross is unusual in that it has been made up of a series of granite blocks, as opposed to having been hewn from a single slab of granite.

Having reached the end of the Granite Way, I cycled through the village of Lydford and stood for a while admiring Lydford Castle. Looking at it, I had no cause for concern. Not so for those men living long-ago within the Forest of Dartmoor and who had transgressed. It was here that the Forest Court used to sit and pass judgement on miscreants brought before it. Lydford Castle was subsequently appointed as the prison for felons convicted under the harsh Stannary Laws, by which time, Lydford had gained wide notoriety as the home of the barbaric form of justice known colloquially as Lydford Law, or 'hang first and try after', which was immortalized in a 1644 poem by William Browne of Tavistock.

If found guilty, sentence could only be passed by the 'Court of Justice Seat' which convened once every three years.

Some writers have gone so far as to suggest that, as the eventual sentence was a foregone conclusion, it was expeditious for the Chief Warden to hang the convicted offender without further ado, rather than detain him for up to three years, only for the next sitting of the 'Court of Justice Seat' to determine his inevitable fate.

Having got this close to Lydford Gorge and never having visited it before, now was the time to put that right. I arrived at the National Trust

car park, secured the bike to the bike rack with the lock provided by Devon Cycle Hire and went to talk to the volunteers at the desk. They explained about the short walk to Devil's Cauldron for anyone preferring to avoid the complete circuit. Both walks involve lots of steps, though the short walk is easier to negotiate.

If you arrive by Trammer (a type of cross-country scooter for the disabled) you can access the spectacular White Lady Waterfall by driving round to the South West entrance.

The National Trust has one Trammer that visitors can borrow. It is provided by the Countryside Mobility Scheme. Membership of the scheme is £2.50 for one month or £10 for a year. Members of the scheme are not charged a fee for use of the Trammer but the National Trust does appreciate voluntary donations towards its maintenance.

I then completed the return journey to Devon Cycle Hire, having had a wonderful morning packed with an exhilarating variety of experiences. Go on; give it a go; you won't regret it.

Note: I discovered that, last year, Devon Cycle Hire did have a Trammer they could lend to visitors. Alas, this Countryside Mobility Scheme has finished. However, it is hoped to have another one arrive for the summer. I strongly advise anyone who is tempted to make use of the Trammer to phone Devon Cycle hire (01837 861141) so as to be sure of its availability. ■

To view the cycling code of conduct for Dartmoor visit - [www.dartmoor.gov.uk/visiting/vi-enjoyingdartmoor/cycling](http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/visiting/vi-enjoyingdartmoor/cycling)



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