

The Rocking Trail

Stunning views – and an eerie experience on an impressive granite tor



STARTING POINT: The car-park on Helman Tor (between Luxulyan and Bodmin). Grid reference SX 062 614. The final road junction is marked by the Saints' Way timber fingerpost.

LENGTH OF WALK: Less than 1 km over grass and rocks – but you can keep to the grass and still have the views. For the total experience you need to be physically able – and brave!

GREENER ALTERNATIVE: Instead of driving to Helman, why not cycle, or take the Par-Newquay train to Luxulyan, then walk along the Saints' Way to Helman? There's much to see at Luxulyan too, and a pub.



Just before you leave the car-park through the kissing gate notice the chippings: these came from the nearby Luxulyan Quarry and are very similar to the granite with its characteristic big feldspar crystals which you will see on the trail. Except, of course, that the chippings are (*almost*) unweathered. As you walk up the hill even if it is a rare calm day you can still see which way the prevailing wind blows. Alongside are the ramparts of a Neolithic camp, which was later modified as a Cornish hedge. You may also see Exmoor ponies, here to keep the gorse and thorn scrub down so heather, and other heathland plants, can flourish. Exmoors are close relatives of the other European wild horses, tough survivors from the Ice Age. You climb up gently between loose boulders ('clitter') – **but how do these get there?**



Part of the answer is obvious when you reach the top where part of the tor has tipped sideways. Granite, weathering, gravity - and an Ice Age - are all that's needed to make these 'clitter' slopes. It seems that in an Ice



Age the loose blocks slide downslope when the top layer melts in summer above frozen ground (or 'permafrost') – well, that's the theory. The main tor shows the strong cracks ('joints') typical of granite and which formed as it cooled and contracted. The joints are roughly vertical and horizontal, defining box shapes. Walk a little further until you have an easy climb to the top. There are some very comfortable rock basins to sit in. Back in the eighteenth century some people thought these were cut by Druids to hold the blood of their sacrificial victims. The truth is more prosaic. They are totally natural, originally the product of weathering by acids in the soil (possibly over millions of years) before the tors were exposed (probably in



the Ice Age of the last couple of million years). The granite magma was intruded into the 400 million years old slates and sandstones round about 280 million years ago. Just beyond the old trig point you will find the logan stone. Try walking across this and you will see why this is "The Rocking Trail"!



If you come down off the trig point and walk north again you can see that one set of joints is no longer horizontal on the side of the hill but slopes downhill. Nowadays scientists think the shape of the hill follows the slope of the far older joints. The 'scrubby' area below the hill on each side was worked for the tin-rich gravels, possibly from



the Bronze Age until the early years of the last century. Much of the rough area is owned by Cornwall Wildlife Trust, and you can follow the Wilderness Trail around the nature reserves, and find out more about the rather special 'scrub'! But before you leave the hill-top you

can usually enjoy views to the north and south coasts, to the china clay district, Bodmin Moor and even Dartmoor. Roche Rock sticks



up to the west, near the tower of Roche church, and is made of a resistant mixture of quartz and tourmaline. This is similar to the material of the ribs on a rock towards the northern tor of Helman Tor. You may even see

loose pieces of luxullianite, named after Luxulyan. It's made of grey quartz, black tourmaline and flesh-pink feldspar.

FORMATION OF GRANITE TORS



Warm, humid climate (last 50 million years, until the Ice Age) **Rotting of granite** (more rotting where joints close together)



Ice Age (last 2 million years) **Rotten granite stripped away to leave tors**