

Lost! On The Road To Nowhere – Dartmoor

They say that when the mist rolls in on Dartmoor it tempers the rough edges of the landscape; obscuring the view of its travellers, sometimes lost beneath a scattering of soft featherlike dew. It covers the ground in soft swirls of a mystical haze. As the low mist gathers speed it quickly forms a soft wet covering, sprinkled delicately through the atmosphere. It settles quickly and spreads throughout the terrain instantly, and in this moment everything changes. One minute the weather is warm and sunny and in the next moment a soft veil separates the light from darkness, transforming the valleys into a mystical journey of discovery, warm and then a chill in the air. It is this exchange however; between light and darkness, soft and harsh, that makes Dartmoor the magical and mystical place that it is.

It was on a Sunday afternoon, when a group of young people made their way to Oakhampton Army Camp. They were excited as the next day they were due to take part in the annual Ten Tors Event. They were very well prepared, and kitted out with everything they would need to cross the wide and challenging terrain of Dartmoor. At least the weather forecast was favourable for the expedition and the ground fairly firm underfoot. They had trained long and hard in order to gain the insight and expertise needed, and most importantly build a sense of fortitude within. This had been achieved, the end result of many long hours of endurance, which marked their journey together. Their preparation included participation in long hikes of a similar duration, so they were clearly mentally, physically and emotionally adept in every aspect of the task. They knew they had done it, and could face the challenge with confidence in their ability.

The group's members included; Emma, Victoria, Josh and David, they had become united in their common interest, developing a comradeship and mutual alliance, which were the seeds of a lasting friendship. Working together as a team over many months, their friendship and alliance had grown into a warm and supportive haven of care and concern for one another, which further developed their bond, sustaining them through many trials on their path, towards reaching their ultimate goal. It was this supportive whole, that the team represented, which enabled them to meet and develop the necessary skills, and momentum to persist with their challenge resisting the obstacle of inertia. Through their shared interest, they had succeeded in reaching the beginning of a journey which would shape their experiences, and develop their skills, changing their lives forever. It was this common ground on which their friendship was based, that it had flourished; the sharing of a journey of huge significance.

They decided like all the other groups taking part, to have an early night and start the adventure the following morning. It must be said however, that they did not sleep well at all; their minds were buzzing with excitement and eagerness, which was difficult to contain, it spilled over into every thought magnetised by the group's anticipation. It stirred their spirits, so they were quite incapable

of sleeping, unable to quiet their minds. It was up and away the next morning. The rush started as hundreds of hikers headed off to the high moors. It surely was a great atmosphere to share.

The first day went well for the group. All check points were reached in good time. The weather which was always a consideration remained good, and landmarks were easily identified. The group were indeed pleased with themselves, and their efforts to meet the desired targets. When darkness gradually crept in, they decided to make camp for the night, having achieved their aim. Their two tents were safely pitched in a gully as they settled down for the night feeling reassured in the knowledge that they had reached their target destination. Able to relax with ease, they fell into a peaceful slumber. Not a sound could be heard, just the infrequent hoot of a distant owl, which served to remind them of their location. However as they were especially tired from the previous night's anticipation, and the day's exertions, they all slept well.

Next morning Victoria opened the door of the tent, and looked out. "Crumbs" she muttered to Emma, with surprise, "It's very misty out here." They went over to wake the lads. "David, who was awoken by the girl's voices, peered out. "Oh heck," he said, turning to Josh "come and have a look at this." The mist had engulfed the gully, but at least they knew where they were, and after all, they had trained for such situations. Their inner fortitude and rapport had served to strengthen the group's resolve and clear determination to continue without delay.

They packed up their tents and gathered their belongings. David declared, "I think it would be best to head down the gully, and take a look at the map, then." "Hopefully by then, we may get some sort of bearing on which way to go." The group walked and walked, but the mist was so thick and predominant, there was just no way of telling which direction to walk in. After about three hours or so, their uncertainty was firmly established and a sense of panic spread briefly between them. They knew they could no longer continue with their current path, as they were totally lost; this meant a change of direction, and tactics. This clearly presented them with a new challenge, as they had not foreseen this occurrence. Although their months of training had prepared them for all weather conditions, becoming lost was not on their agenda, and thus arriving at this conclusion presented a new challenge for each of them, and for the group as a whole; one they had not fully expected.

It is always good practice at times like this to keep calm, which they did. "If we could only find a river" said Josh, "we could follow it" "Yes, even a road or anything which signalled a clear direction" replied Emma. A further hour of uncertainty passed, and after some lunch, they persevered with their quest to stay calm and centred in the midst of their uncertainty, and stay open and alert to the challenge and the options presented to them. Continuing in this spirit; they did eventually find a road, however they were not sure about the direction, or where it would lead. "If we go right we can't go wrong" suggested Victoria. There was some sort of logic in that, and they headed off to the right. After a mile or two, the group noticed a wooden coppice on the left hand side of the road, it was difficult to see, but there appeared to be a man sawing wood, just alongside a small hut.

“Excuse me” shouted David, “could you help us, we’re lost, can you tell us where the road leads to please.” The man looked up, “you’re on the road to Nowhere” he replied. “That’s a big help” grunted Emma. “Really” exclaimed David. The man put down his saw, and walked over to the gate that led into the wood. “Everyone says that...” he continued in a broad Devon dialect, “keep ee’ going, and ee’ will get nowhere.” “Gee thanks” replied Victoria, and turning to the rest said “we’ve got a right one here, let’s keep going anyway.” As they walked they once again checked their map. David confirmed, “I think that guy was truly winding us up. Come on, let’s keep going this way.

By this time, the guys manning the check point where they should have reached some time earlier had raised the alarm, and search parties were despatched into the mist, in an effort to locate them. Meanwhile, the group continued their march along the road, hoping for some sort of name or landmark they could recognise, in order to get some sort of bearing on their position.

After 30 minutes, they were in luck. Up ahead was a bridge over a river. At last they thought, and with this new discovery, a change of heart, we may get somewhere. Even better, down by the river’s edge, they spotted, what looked like two fishermen sat by the river, fishing! “Excuse me” shouted Josh, “We’re lost,” “Can you tell us where we are.” One of the fishermen put down his rod, briefly looked at the other and replied, “Keep going, you’re on the road to Nowhere.” “Another bloke with a weird sense of humour” said David. However the comparable remark seemed peculiar. The expedition had certainly changed their course, and opened their minds to a sense of new discovery, in the most peculiar of circumstances. “Come on” said Josh, “be honest with us, where on earth are we.” The other fisherman shouted back, “believe me if you keep going, you will reach Nowhere.” “People around here, sure have a strange sense of humour” exclaimed Victoria, trying to make light of the situation. “It must be a shared joke amongst the local people. Do they think we are just a bunch of gullible kids” she thought out loud. “Come on we, will show them,” and off they went down the road with a new determination.

The mist still swirled around, but they continued with their journey, sure it would lead somewhere, they just kept walking, not giving in to defeat, this was not an acceptable option. Suddenly in the distance something stood out, yes, it looked like buildings of some sort. As they got nearer, the mist cleared just for a second or two, and there before their eyes was a small village and even a church! Nearing the hamlet they could just make out the village signpost. There, clearly in black letters on a white background was the name of the village; Nowhere.

The group walked through the village, not a soul could be seen, not one person. There were just cottages and the old church. It all just looked abandoned. There was a noticeable quietness about the place, which was distinctly eerie, accompanied by the mist, which made it feel almost mysterious. As they reached the small village green at the centre of the village, Emma cracked a joke to lift their mood. “At least we can say we are in the middle of nowhere.” With that they heard a voice. “You look lost.” Coming down the path from the church, there was a Vicar, with a big smile on

his face. "Can I be of assistance?" "Yes please Vicar" replied Emma immediately. "We were taking part in the Ten Tors Trek, and got hopelessly lost. We just want to find our way back." The Vicar sensing their apprehension took a moment to think, "If you take this road here, and go about a mile and take the second turning on the right, the road will take you back to a place you will know." A chorus of "Thank you very much" rang out from the group. They headed off, turning back to give a wave, but to their surprise he had gone.

Following the directions, the group waked on. It was such a relief, when they saw the check point up ahead. "Morning you lot," the man at the check point greeted them. David looked surprised, "We've been lost for hours, we must be way behind the others, and If it was not for the Vicar we met in the village of Nowhere, we would not have made it here at all." "Nowhere" said the guide, looking rather puzzled, "you must be mistaken, there is no village by that name around here. Anyway, keep going, you are the first team to check in here this morning. Good Luck, and well done."

Ray Steed

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