

**Jane Marchand**

**Prehistoric round houses on Dartmoor.**

These round houses at Smallacombe, of which we've got four, very good examples because they're actually quite big ones, and you can see how well they were constructed, but we know that in fact that we've got a huge number of round houses on Dartmoor, at least 5,000 have survived and there were probably very much more than that, but they've been lost, probably their stone has been taken away. I think when you look at them now their dilapidated condition actually slightly belies what comfortable homes they must have been: from excavations we know that they had central hearths, using a big hearth stone, they would have been well roofed, again we're not absolutely sure what they used but probably just the natural, using heather or possibly even rush; the roof would have been held upright by a central pole and then around the inner ring of the wall, the enclosing wall, there would have been ring of upright poles which would have then supported the roof which would have reached an apex at the centre of the hut circle. These ones here at Smallacombe, you can still see the entrances on the south, southeast side, obviously away from the prevailing winds. These four round houses here at Smallacombe were actually the subject of an excavation in August 1896 by the Dartmoor Exploration Committee, they actually excavated three and a half of the round houses, found quite a lot of pottery, quite a lot of prehistoric pottery, some flint tools and quite a lot of charcoal, which obviously shows that there were fires being used in them. Probably the most interesting one is this one, which is the one actually on the most northern part of the enclosure, and from that one they actually produced some really very impressive pottery which actually they've got in Plymouth Museum, there's one particularly nice piece which looks like it was a cooking pot, but it was very elaborately decorated and unlike other pottery that's been retrieved from Dartmoor round houses. The problem on Dartmoor though is because the soil is so acidic it actually quickly rots away anything like bone or metal, so the only things we would expect to find are stone and these bits of pottery. But today archaeology's moved on so much that you can get an awful lot of evidence from the soil itself it's paleoenvironmental evidence, so we can actually tell by analysing soil, we can look at the pollen, it gives us an idea of what was being grown, also what the natural cover was of the land around.