

Deborah Griffiths

The history of boundary markers on the moor.

There's a very long tradition of marking territories on Dartmoor, as we stand here, if we look east we can see a very straight ridge which is known as Hamel Down, and on a really nice day you can just pick up some, what look like tiny pimples standing on the skyline there and those are actually prehistoric burial cairns, quite large and significant ones when you get there, and we think they served a dual purpose, not only to house a burial, but also as territory markers, that they were meant to be seen very clearly on the horizon. And then much closer to us we can see a prehistoric reave, this long stony bank that was constructed somewhere around three and a half thousand years ago, and these reaves also served as territorial boundary markers, but they also marked the boundaries between what, in prehistoric times would have been enclosed land and open moorland, and then within the enclosed land they marked the boundaries of small fields; and some reaves endured as parish boundaries into the medieval period and into the present. In medieval times people marked boundaries of parishes and manors by upright stones, so that you could see where exactly on the ground certain sorts of territories began and ended; and when the Duke of Somerset bought the manor of Ilsington in the middle of the 19th century, he added to the boundary stones that were already there and created a number of boundary stones between the manor and parish of Ilsington and that of Manaton, and these are very distinctive, they're round topped worked granite stones looking a bit like a graveyard stone, and on one side is inscribed DS for Duke of Somerset and the date of 1853 when he acquired the manor, and on the other side they gave rather eccentric names to the stones, again which are inscribed, so there's one called owlacombe, there's one called Old Jack and then there's a series of royal ones, so there's Prince Albert and there's Victoria and the Prince of Wales. And when the National Park Authority celebrated its 50th birthday in 2001 we thought it would be nice to put up another stone, because obviously we are now the owners of Haytor, to add to the series, so we constructed one in the same style and we invited Prince Charles to unveil it, so on one side it says the Prince of Wales and on the other side it says DNPA 2001.