

Ten Tors - Fifty Years On

Background

It was an Army Colonel who had the bright idea and founded the Ten Tors Dartmoor Expedition as a challenge for young people. The challenge involved hiking to ten of the Tors over a single weekend. Teams would camp, and be under the stars if the weather was kind. The Junior Leaders' Regiment, Royal Signals organised the first event in 1960, inviting teams from RAF Halton. Ten Halton apprentices volunteered. By 1965 the Ten Tors Expedition had matured and gained notoriety. Each team would now consist of six individuals and a range of distance options were offered. There was a 40 mile challenge, 50 mile and a 60 mile trek for the senior teams ages 18+. It was this latter category which was offered to the 103rd Entry, now approaching their final year at RAF Halton.

Despite their military training, (never volunteer!), six individuals did raise their hands and set about training under the guidance of Alan Stephens and Ernie Fox from the RAF Halton permanent staff. The six were David Cochran, Ron Dent, Kevin Dillon, John Dillon, Mike Lewry and Malcolm Watts. It was this team that was one of the first RAF teams to complete the 60 mile course.



May 2015

Fast forward to 2015 and somebody had an idea, it grew legs and with a following wind, a group of OAPs were sought to attempt a Golden Anniversary Expedition. Could we find any of the original 1965 team members?

The word went out and amazingly four of the original team from the 103rd went against their natural instincts and registered their interests. In addition, Alan Stephens, our 1965 Team Manager and Ernie Fox, our 1965 Team Trainer found themselves available, along with Mick Bossy and Peter Callus who fancied a long walk.

Picture left: Four of the original 1965 team: Malcolm Watts, David Cochran, Mike Lewry and Ron Dent.



Ten Tors - Fifty Years On

Piss Poor Planning Promotes Piss Poor Performance

Military folk will be well aware that Forward Planning is a vital element to any successful campaign.

Assured that we have all the required permissions from the Ten Tors organisers, we settled to consider the challenge.

Picture right, we have our Planning Committee ironing out the last and finer details. Clearly, such matters could not be performed on empty stomachs. Head of the table is our Team Manager, Alan Stephens, who went on in later years to become the Ten Tors Head Scrutineer. Also in shot are Malcolm Watts, Mike Lewry, Ron Dent, Julie Dent, Ingrid Shales and Ernie Fox.

The ladies provided nutrition advice, oversaw expedition compliance and were to act as emergency medical backup during the walk.



Six Intrepid Walkers

Ready for the off, we now have Peter Callus and Mick Bossy completing our team of six. We have maps, a route and the ladies behind the camera.

You may notice the lack of camping gear with only Peter wearing a rucksack. One planning decision was not to inflict unnecessary strain on our OAPs by asking them to carry tents or anything too bulky.

A final check on the weather forecast suggested that our team should complete the distance free of precipitation, hence the relaxed smiles and one pair of optimistic dark glasses.



Ten Tors - Fifty Years On

Are We Nearly There Yet?

We were off and very soon we found ourselves in the middle of Dartmoor. One member was delegated as a sun seeker, two offered to check out the wild-life while this writer suddenly discovered that there was indeed a mobile signal on the moor.

We were surprised by the number of random people wandering the moor and even more surprised to discover that the Army had provided porta-loos for anyone in need; not something that would have been seen in 1965. Maybe our letter to the organisers triggered some special facilities for our OAPs.

Comfort break over, we continued with renewed enthusiasm and it wasn't long before we could see other teams heading for the Finish.



The End in Sight

The sight that greeted us was unexpected. It was as if a village fete had crashed an army exercise. Crowds were cheering the returning teams and exhausted walkers could be seen being escorted off the moor.

We headed for the Finish Line not knowing what sort of reception we would get. To our knowledge, no team has ever attempted a Golden Anniversary trek by returning after 50 years.



Ten Tors - Fifty Years On

The Finish

In 1965 the end of the challenge was marked by a uniformed chap with a clipboard. How times have changed. We now have cheering crowds, inflated arches, the Press and an increased assortment of Army officers. Quite what the spectators made of this motley bunch is anyone's guess.

Surprisingly, we were formally congratulated on our efforts and each team member presented with a shiny Ten Tors medal.

The Press required the obligatory interview and then we were on our way down the hill to Oakhampton Camp for a welcome cuppa.

A formal team debrief was deemed to be unnecessary on this occasion, so with a job well done, we were bundled into our transport and returned to our waiting carriages.

Anyone for the Diamond Anniversary?

