

PEBBLEBED QUEST

CASTLES AND DRAGONS



Start at Four Firs car park
Follows rough tracks, some sloping sections and steps.
3km (approx 90min) with optional loop +1km (+30mins)

Four Firs is a popular place to start exploring the Pebblebed Heaths National Nature Reserve, just off the B3179 and B3180.

1. From the carpark entrance cross the road with care and follow the waymarked path (East Devon Way) towards Woodbury Castle.

On each corner of the crossroad is a burial mound thought to be bronze age. These ancient monuments were modified in the 19th Century and planted with pine trees, giving the junction its name, Four Firs!

You are now on Woodbury common. Though many people call the entire heath Woodbury common, it is only one of a whole collection of commons.

2. Continue north until you reach Woodbury Castle car park, cross the car park and enter the hillfort using steps up and over the ancient ramparts.

Find the information boards - Can you find out when people would have lived here and imagine what it would have looked like?

Woodbury Castle is an impressive example of the building skills of iron age people who would have created the huge banks and ditches using wooden or bone tools. Today the inside of the hillfort is wooded, the large beech trees are over 200 years old.

Branches which were damaged are removed to keep people safe, with the tall columns of deadwood left to provide food and nesting places for insects and birds. Recent work has taken place to repair damaged banks to protect the monument for the future.

3. Leave the hillfort through the sloped gap in the banks to the east. Walk down the track through the plantation planted with Douglas fir and Corsican pine and out onto the heath.

Under your feet lie up to 30 metres of pebblebeds – layers of rounded pebbles in red sandstone. The pebbles were deposited by a huge river flowing through a desert during the Triassic (240 Million years ago). Topped with a thin layer of acidic infertile soil which is ideal to support heathland plants. The pebbles, known locally as ‘popples’, have been used for walls and floors and even gave their name to the village of Newton Poppleford.

4. Turn right and follow the track to the corner of the plantation where the track splits in different directions. At this junction turn left and continue along the wide stony track.

5. Halfway along the wide stony track turn right onto a grassy track (If you reach Uphams plantation you have gone too far!).

As you continue across the heath you will be surrounded by special heathland plants including two types of gorse and three different heathers. Bell heather, ling and cross-leaved heath, all have purple/pinkish flowers but different petal shapes and arrangements of leaves.

Can you find all three species of heather?

6. Continue down to Model Airfield car park and cross the road. Pass another barrow to your right and walk down to the gate, closing it behind you, and continue ahead across the boardwalk.

You are now on Bicton Common. Dartmoor hill ponies and cattle graze here in the summer. The streams and wet places on the heaths are the home of the dragons! Dragonflies, and the daintier damselflies, can be seen hunting for midges around the rushes. These are the predators of the insect realm, both in water as larvae or on the wing as adults.

7. At the crossroads, either turn right for a shortcut to the carpark or carry on by turning left.

8. Continue down hill towards the stream at the bottom, before the stream follow the track around a right hand bend and follow it back up hill.

Look out for the Gibraltar stone. The heath has a long history of providing a place for the military to train.

What is the date on the stone and why is it here?

9. From the Gibraltar stone, retrace your steps to the track, turn left and follow the track down and then up toward the stand of trees.

Stop to admire the view at Lookout cove!

10. Continue to the corner of the plantation and turn right at the bench. At the end of the trees take the middle path back to Four Firs car park.

As you walk back to the car park listen for a stonechat's call which sounds like two pebbles being knocked together, and the scratchy song of Dartford warblers.



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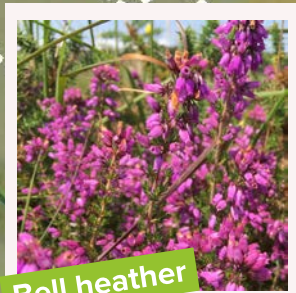


Devon
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Take a picture during your quest
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Bell heather



Cross leaved heath



Ling (Calluna)



Stonechat



Southern damselfly



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QUEST

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