

# Learn English With Photos 8 – Dartmoor

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Hello and welcome to episode eight of Learn English With Photos. In the first part of this lesson I'm going to be talking about Dartmoor National Park, which one of my favourite areas of England. I'll then go over some of the vocabulary we've seen, and finally I'll ask you some questions about related topics.

I was born and grew up in Plymouth in the county of Devon in the south-west of England. As you can see from this map, Plymouth is just a few miles from Dartmoor, so I've got to know the place quite well over the years. Let's begin with a general description.

Dartmoor, which takes its name from the river Dart, is an area of moorland which covers 954 square kilometres, that's 368 square miles. A moor is an area of open and usually high land with poor soil that is covered mainly with grass, heather, gorse and bracken. Locals tend to refer to it as just 'the moors'.

Dartmoor is known for its tors — hills topped with outcrops of granite. More than 160 of the hills of Dartmoor have the word tor in their name. The highest point is High Willhays, which is 621 metres or 2,037 feet above sea level. The tors are the focus of an annual event known as the Ten Tors Challenge, when around 2400 young people aged between 14 and 19 walk for distances of up to 88 kilometres (or 55 miles) between ten tors on many differing routes.

Much more rain falls on Dartmoor than in the surrounding lowlands. As much of the national park is covered in thick layers of peat, the rain is usually absorbed quickly and distributed slowly, so the moor is rarely dry. In areas where water accumulates, dangerous bogs or mires can result.

Some of the bogs on Dartmoor have achieved notoriety, the most notable being Fox Tor Mires, supposedly the inspiration for Great Grimpen Mire in Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes novel *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

Although parts of Dartmoor have been used as military firing ranges for over 200 years, the public enjoy extensive access rights and it is a popular tourist destination.

So what is there to see and do on Dartmoor?

Well, since Dartmoor is an area of outstanding natural beauty, you could just go for a drive to admire the scenery, but there are plenty of more energetic options.

The oldest leisure pursuit on the moor is hillwalking. However, it's important to have the right equipment with you, especially if you are intending to go off the beaten track as the weather can change very suddenly. Many people have lost their lives on the moors because they were badly equipped. So if you do go hiking on Dartmoor, be sure to take some waterproof clothing and a compass.

The activity known as letterboxing originated on Dartmoor in the 19th century and has become increasingly popular in recent decades. Watertight containers, or 'letterboxes', are hidden

throughout the moor, each containing a visitor's book and a rubber stamp. Visitors take an impression of the letterbox's rubber stamp as proof of finding the box and record their visit by stamping their own personal stamp in the letterbox's logbook. A recent related development is geocaching. Geocache clues make use of GPS coordinates, where letterboxing clues tend to consist of grid references and compass bearings.

Whitewater kayaking and canoeing are popular on the rivers due to the high rainfall. Other activities include rock climbing on the granite tors, horse riding, and cycling—though you'll need a mountain bike if you're going off road. And if you want something a bit more relaxing, you could try angling for trout and salmon—although you'll probably need a permit as much of the river fishing on Dartmoor is privately owned.

The Dartmoor landscape is scattered with the marks left by the many generations who have lived and worked there over the centuries — such as the remains of the once mighty Dartmoor tin-mining industry, and farmhouses long since abandoned. Dartmoor also contains the largest concentration of Bronze Age remains in the United Kingdom. The climate at the time was warmer than today, and much of today's moorland was covered with trees. The prehistoric settlers began clearing the forest, and established the first farming communities. Numerous prehistoric menhirs (more usually referred to locally as standing stones or longstones), stone circles, cairns and stone rows are to be found on the moor.

Some way into the moor stands the town of Princetown, the site of the notorious Dartmoor Prison, which was originally built both by, and for, prisoners of war from the Napoleonic Wars. The prison has a reputation for being escape-proof, due to both the buildings themselves and its physical location. The Dartmoor Prison Museum contains an interesting collection of artefacts and provides a unique insight into prison life both past and present.

While Princetown is not particularly attractive—the prison doesn't help—there are plenty of other, more picturesque small towns and villages dotted all over Dartmoor. One of my favourite spots is Brentor, where the tiny church is perched on top of the rocky outcrop of the same name.

And, of course, there's no shortage of pubs, where you can have a pint of beer while you recover from all your exertions. Just make sure you don't drink and drive!

No description of Dartmoor would be complete without mention of the famous Dartmoor ponies. Because of the extreme weather conditions experienced on the moors, the Dartmoor is a particularly hardy breed with excellent stamina. Over the centuries it has been used as a working animal by local tin miners and quarry workers. When the mines closed, some ponies were kept for farming, but most of the ponies were turned out onto the moor.

A few decades ago, the pony population was estimated at around 30,000, but this figure has steadily dwindled to less than two thousand. This is due to a number of factors, such as a reduction in the demand for ponies, and the fact that farmers grazing ponies on the uplands receive no subsidies. It's illegal to feed the ponies since it encourages them to stay near the road where they might be killed or seriously injured. Moreover, since the ponies are untamed, they can be unpredictable and may kick and bite if approached. Despite all this, the ponies are very popular with visitors, and it is a very common sight to see ponies being fed snacks through an open car window.

Ponies are not the only hazard for the Dartmoor motorist. It's quite common to find sheep lying in the middle of the road, hence the warning: Take Moor Care.

You might also see a tiger—but only if you visit the Dartmoor Wildlife Park, which was the inspiration for the Hollywood movie 'We Bought A Zoo'.

Now that we've finished exploring Dartmoor, let's go over some of the vocabulary we've seen. I'll say each word twice and you can repeat it after me if you like. I'll also make a few comments as we go along.

The first word is ...

# Vocabulary

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- ❑ **angling** — angling is the activity of fishing with a fishing rod
- ❑ **bog** — a bog is an area of land which is very wet and muddy
- ❑ **bracken** — a large plant that grows thickly in open areas of countryside, especially on hills, and in woods
- ❑ **breed** — a breed of a pet animal or a farm animal is a particular type of it
- ❑ **Bronze Age** — period of time when people started making things from bronze 4,000-6,000 years ago
- ❑ **cairn** — pile of stones which marks a boundary, a route across rough ground, or the top of a mountain
- ❑ **canoe** — a light narrow boat with both ends sharp that is usually propelled by paddling
- ❑ **century** — a period of one hundred years
- ❑ **clear** — remove things from an area that you do not want to be there
- ❑ **climate** — the weather conditions in a particular place
- ❑ **compass** — an instrument that you use for finding directions
- ❑ **cycling** — the activity of riding a bicycle
- ❑ **decade** — a period of ten years
- ❑ **dwindle** — become less in number
- ❑ **energetic** — involving a lot of physical effort or movement
- ❑ **farming** — the activity of growing crops or keeping animals on a farm
- ❑ **feed** — to give food to
- ❑ **firing range** — an open area of land where people can practise firing guns
- ❑ **fishing** — the sport, hobby, or business of catching fish
- ❑ **geocaching** — a treasure hunting game where you use a GPS to hide and seek containers with other participants in the activity
- ❑ **gorse** — dark green bush with yellow flowers and sharp prickles
- ❑ **GPS** — an abbreviation for global positioning system
- ❑ **granite** — a very hard igneous rock often used as a building material
- ❑ **graze** — when animals such as cows or sheep graze, they eat grass or other plants
- ❑ **hardy** — people and animals that are hardy are strong and able to cope with difficult conditions
- ❑ **hazard** — a hazard is something which could be dangerous to your health or safety
- ❑ **heather (U)** — a low, spreading plant with small purple, pink, or white flowers
- ❑ **hiking** — the activity of going for long walks in the country, especially for enjoyment
- ❑ **hillwalking** — the activity of walking up and down hills
- ❑ **horse-riding** — the activity of riding a horse, especially for enjoyment or as a form of exercise
- ❑ **insight** — a deep understanding of something
- ❑ **kayak** — a narrow boat like a canoe, originally used by the Eskimoes
- ❑ **letterboxing** — an outdoor hobby that combines elements of orienteering and puzzle solving
- ❑ **log book** — a book in which someone records details and events relating to something such as a journey, for example
- ❑ **menhir** — a large upright standing stone

- ❑ **mine** — deep hole in the ground where minerals such as coal or diamonds are extracted
- ❑ **mire** — an area of wet, soggy, muddy ground
- ❑ **moor(land)** — area of open land usually with peaty soil covered with heather, bracken and moss
- ❑ **mountain bike** — a type of bicycle that is suitable for riding over rough ground
- ❑ **notorious** — well-known for something bad
- ❑ **off the beaten track** — in a place where few people go, far from any main roads and towns
- ❑ **outcrop** — a large area of rock sticking out of the ground
- ❑ **outstanding** — very remarkable and impressive
- ❑ **peat** — decaying plant material often found under the ground in cool, wet regions
- ❑ **picturesque** — describes a place that is attractive and interesting with no ugly modern buildings
- ❑ **pint** — a unit of measurement for liquids equivalent to 0.473 litres
- ❑ **pony** — a type of small horse
- ❑ **prehistoric** — describes people or things which existed before information was written down
- ❑ **quarry** — area dug out from a piece of land or a mountain in order to get stone or minerals
- ❑ **rainfall (U)** — the amount of rain that falls in a particular place during a particular period
- ❑ **remains** — things from an earlier period of history, often found buried in the ground
- ❑ **rubber stamp** — small device with a name, date, or symbol on it which you press on to an ink pad and then on to a document
- ❑ **salmon** — large silver-coloured fish with pink flesh
- ❑ **scenery (U)** — the scenery in a country area is everything you can see around you
- ❑ **sea level** — the average level of the sea with respect to the land
- ❑ **settler** — settlers are people who go to live in a particular place, often a new region or country
- ❑ **sheep** (plural: **sheep**) — farm animal which is kept for its wool or its meat
- ❑ **stamina (U)** — the physical or mental energy you need to do a tiring activity for a long time
- ❑ **subsidy** — money paid by the government to help an industry or business
- ❑ **tin** — a soft, silvery-white metal used to make containers for food
- ❑ **tor** — a rocky peak or hill
- ❑ **trout** — a fairly large fish that lives in rivers and streams and is eaten as food
- ❑ **uplands** — areas of high land
- ❑ **waterproof** — something that is waterproof does not let water pass through, for example, a coat
- ❑ **watertight** — something that is watertight does not let water enter, for example, a container

# Questions

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1. Which areas of Britain have you visited, or would you like to visit?
2. Can you describe one of the national parks in your country?
3. How would you spend a day on Dartmoor?
4. The lesson mentions leisure activities such as cycling, hiking, and canoeing. What other outdoor leisure activities can you think of?
5. What are your favourite leisure activities?
6. What type of scenery do you prefer?
7. Do you prefer to go on holiday in the country or by the sea? Why?
8. What is the most beautiful natural place you've ever visited? Describe it.