

day out

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Your handy guide to this month's Great Days Out

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01 A RIDE IN THE WILD

DARTMOOR, DEVON

Mount up for a ride across the untamed landscape of Dartmoor. **Sian Lewis** climbs into the saddle Photos: James Osmond



Was there ever an area more suited to exploring on horseback than Dartmoor? Steeped in folklore and with ever-changing scenery, it's impossible to tire of this wild terrain.

I took to the saddle for a 22-mile (35km) adventure with Liberty Trails, which specialises in long-distance rides across Dartmoor. Their beautiful, sure-footed quarter horses – a popular American breed of small, fast horses used for races and rodeos – are a delight to ride or horse owners can bring their own steeds for the excursion.

Elaine Michelle Prior, Liberty Trails' founder, grew up exploring these moors on ponies and now organises small, tailor-made rides through the national park. Experienced riders can take on single- or multi-day tramps through the park's wild places or explore *War Horse* territory

with a tailored ride visiting locations from the movie. There's even a chance to join the cattle drives in late spring.

UNTAMED MOORLAND

Long distance horse-riding is not for the unfit or the delicate of behind but it is an immensely rewarding way to

“We rode through peat passes and past herds of curious wild ponies”

immerse yourself in the landscape and explore off the beaten track. While six hours in the saddle was testing, I found that what is hard on the backside is good for the soul.

I got up bright and early to meet Fred, the glossy horse who would be my partner in adventure. Our guide was farmer Phil Heard, who knows the moors inside and out and

can read the land effortlessly. He rode ahead to lead the way, kitted out in a Stetson and floor-length coat, like a Devonian version of the Marlboro man.

We set off from the old Meldon Quarry, now a tranquil pond nestled under a viaduct, and then cantered out onto the moor.

Dartmoor is one of the few places in England that still feels wild and untamed, and as we

rode along paths of exposed bedrock in the marshy ground known as peat passes and past herds of wild ponies, I had a lesson in the area's history and folklore from Elaine.

Stopping at the lonely, windswept memorial to the airmen whose plane crashed here during the Second World War, we spotted the strange granite towers of Drogo



stay

ARUNDELL ARMS HOTEL

A renowned country sports hotel owned and run by the Fox-Edwards family since 1961. Single rooms from £95, Dinner, bed and breakfast from £140.

The Arundell Arms Hotel, Lifton, Devon PL16 0AA 01566 784666 www.arundellarms.com



ABOVE The landscape featured in the *War Horse* movie is criss-crossed with bridle paths **BELOW** Shrouded in mist, the eerie Hound Tor has a dark and mystical origin according to folklore **OPPOSITE PAGE** Liberty Trails founder Elaine shepherds Sian on her ride across Dartmoor





ABOVE Back at the Stables, Fred receives a welcome reward for carrying Sian around the Moors

Castle in the distance, then came upon eerie Whitehorse Hill. A prehistoric burial site was unearthed here in 2011 that furnished archaeologists with a treasure trove of textiles, flint knives and beautiful amber beads.

Phil guided us past boggy spots and over tufty heather, and we paused for a lunchtime picnic by my

“The landscape started to soften as we came upon Jay’s Grave”

favourite Dartmoor pub, the Warren Inn, where a peat fire has been burning since 1845.

The landscape began to soften as we came upon Jay’s Grave, a landmark with a heartbreaking history. Here lies a young girl who killed herself centuries ago but, mysteriously, her grave is always covered in fresh flowers, and no one has ever

seen who leaves them there.

We were on the home stretch as Dartmoor’s iconic stone tors appeared on the horizon. I love the stories of how some of them came to be. Legend has it that a hunter and his pack of dogs were turned to stone by a witch here. The huntsman, forever petrified, became Bowerman’s Nose, while his faithful dogs were turned into the scattered rocks found at Hound Tor.

After six hours in the saddle, the stables near Widecombe-in-the-Moor were a welcome sight. I was very fond of Fred by now, after he’d looked after me so well, and I had a chance to give him some love back by grooming him and getting him fed and bedded down.

Then it was our turn to get warmed up, at the Arundell Arms hotel in the little village

of Lifton. A cosy sporting hotel that’s been run by the Fox-Edwards family for 50 years, this is the perfect place to rest weary bones after a day on horseback. The Arundell is a place that still offers a real old-world welcome, and their magical formula of hot bath, delicious, locally sourced food, a stint by the roaring fire in the sitting room followed by a comfy bed was the perfect tonic after a day riding the ranges of Devon’s hinterland.

Liberty Trails

Two-day guided ride (with a three-night hotel stay): from £850pp. For a group booking of four riders, prices start from £650 pp.

The Lodge, Middlemoor, Dartmoor, Devon PL19 9DY 07967 823674

www.libertytrails.co.uk



Sian Lewis, our intrepid online editor, is a coffee and adventure addict

FIVE PLACES TO TRY ENDURANCE RIDING



Adventure Clydesdale, Dartmoor

www.adventureclydesdale.com

Clydesdale horses are the big friendly giants of the equine world and are perfect for long-distance riding. Adventure Clydesdale offers treks through Dartmoor, Exmoor and Bodmin Moor.

Kimmerston Riding Centre, Northumberland

www.kimmerston.com

Explore the Cheviot hills and then go for a gallop along the beach at Holy Island, in the shadow of Lindisfarne castle. The brave can even ride into the sea for a bareback swim.

Stonetrail Trekking Centre, Cumbria

www.stonetrailridingcentre.com

Stonetrail offers four-day rides along the Yorkshire Dales’ Pennine Bridleway, providing panoramic views of the three peaks and the Eden valley.

The Great Dragon Ride, Wales

www.emagin.org

Own your own horse and a longing for an adventure? Search for the Great Dragon Ride route on the British Horse Society’s Emagin website and you’ll discover a 293-mile trail that meanders from the north to the south of Wales.

Highlands Unbridled, Scotland

www.highlandsunbridled.co.uk

Highlands Unbridled will take you on a coast-to-coast ride across the country on stalker trails, past lochs, mountains and the occasional eagle.