

A second chance



Our introduction to the beauty of Dartmoor came five years ago when we broke our journey with a one night stopover on the way to see our son who lives in Newquay, Cornwall. We had had no idea where to stay and no recommendations to help us select a good place. With information gleaned from travel guides we chose to stop over at Dartmeet. It sounded wonderful – the meeting of the East and West Dart rivers and an old hunting lodge for accommodation.

However, I only have vague memories the journey, moors and lodge. I do have memories that have coloured my judgement though for the next five years. I can recall a long tedious journey and even though it was the month of June, the most appalling wet, cold and windy weather. Even the history and decor of the hunting lodge did not lift our spirits. The river rushing so close to the lodge on the one side seemed to conjure up flash floods in my mind and a thunder storm in the night did not help to allay my fears as we were deafened by the noise of the thunder reverberating in the valleys.

We never lingered in the morning and that is where we made our mistake. We did not give Dartmeet a chance. Since that visit we have always described Dartmeet as being part of the dark side of Dartmoor - a rather hastily drawn conclusion being backed up by the contrast we encountered as we travelled to Widecombe-in-the-Moor and then north out of the moor. The scenery was superb and the narrow roads between slate walls covered with flowering dog roses and honey suckle, not only a challenge to negotiate with fractionally enough room for two cars to pass, but also exquisitely beautiful. For us, Dartmoor had an

attractive, beautiful light side in the north and a dark sombre side in the south. Sadly, as it is so easy to do, we have passed this inadequate and inaccurate description on to our family and friends.

We revisited Dartmeet last year. As we approached, coming over a high moor, it was stunningly beautiful. How could the meeting place of two rivers not be so? We parked the car and, following the West Dart, walked to the bridge – a wonderful stone construction. The only sounds to be heard were the rushing water and the birds singing. It was tempting to stay on the bridge to watch the waters of the two rivers meet and flow out of sight down the valley. A little path with a small wooden sign post to stepping stones proved a greater attraction. The stepping stones were flattened boulders evenly situated giving a negotiable crossing to the farthest bank and water meadows. A few rocks gave resting places for anyone who preferred to sit a while instead of tackling the stepping stones. I chose the resting bit. Clear water, tiny streams trickling through the marshy bank to join the river and the sound of the water as it babbled over the stones and rocks on the river bed. The birds and insects added to this rather idyllic place with all its charm and beauty. There are several places that we revisit when we spend our short breaks on the moor and, with a much more accurate and better appreciation of it, Dartmeet has been added to our list and thoroughly recommended when we talk about Dartmoor.

I learned much after our revisit to Dartmeet. Our conclusions which were so wrong had been unwittingly construed by impressions drawn up too hastily. We allowed ourselves to be influenced by circumstances too. The weather with its gloom had put us off. I thought of how easy it is to be put off someone who does not initially appeal to us for whatever reason. Perhaps communication or feeling at ease with people is not their strong point – awkwardness and embarrassment make things difficult – but maybe that someone is desperately hoping that you will not walk away. The off-handed or 'leave me alone' stance might suggest a bad day, or difficult situations, failure or stresses that have proved too much to cope with. Staying a little while longer might help to bridge a small gap or gulf and ultimately give hope to someone is desperate to talk or find help.

It was so important for us to give Dartmeet a second chance. We all need second chances and to give them too, either by staying a little longer or going back to try again. I often think of the joy that lights up a child's face when they find they have got a second chance – to try again, to say sorry so that they can get on with whatever they were doing or going to do before they were naughty and life came to a sudden standstill as correction had to be listened to and acted upon. Second chances matter so much and can bring such gratitude and joy.

I am grateful too for the second chance God has given us in the life, death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus, on the cross. He offered a forgiveness that lasts for eternity. The forgiveness we offer may not be so lasting but it may be the instrument by which someone can start a journey that brings them opportunities for happiness and new beginnings.