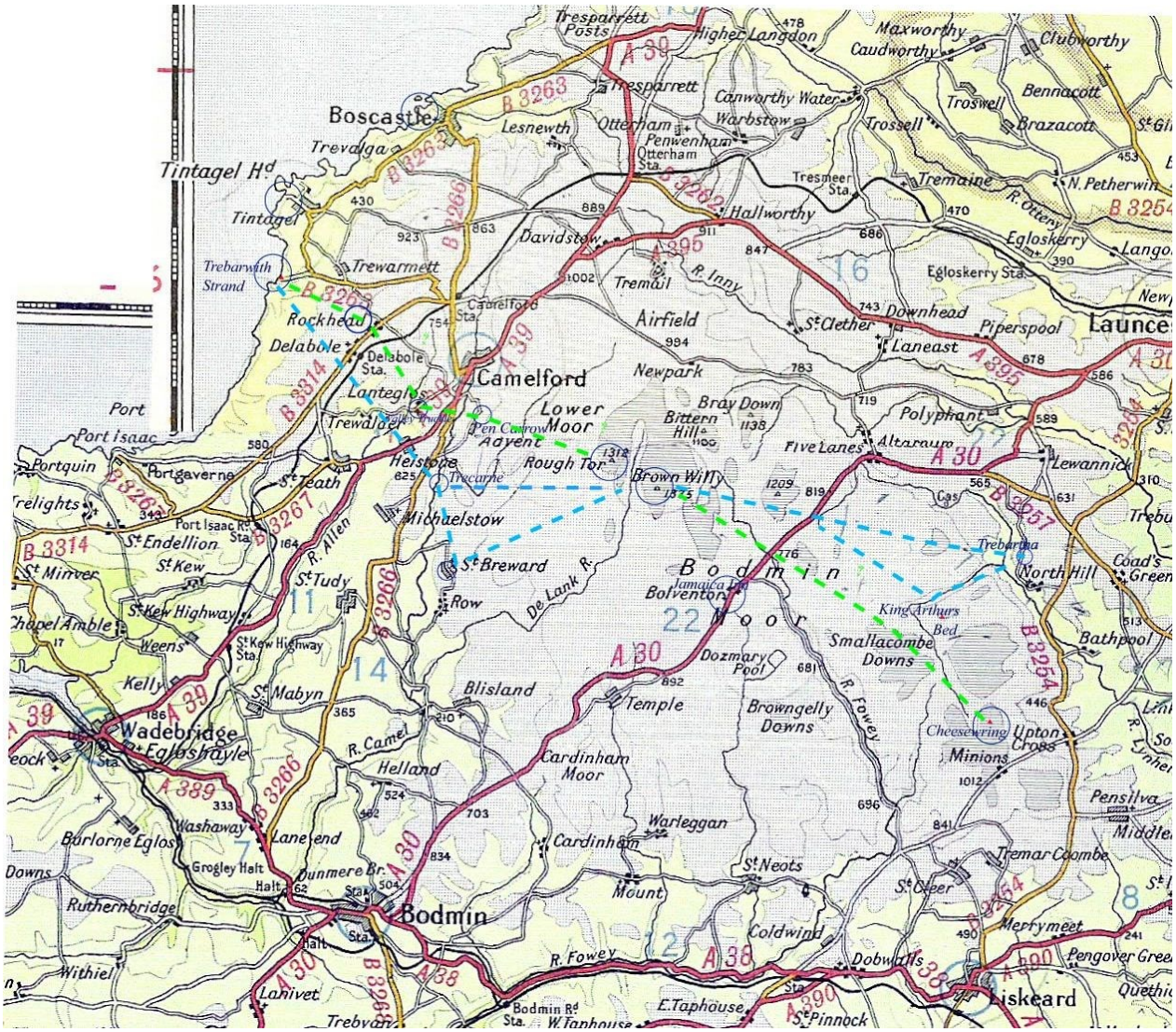
Geoff's Memories of
Bodmin Moor and Fort Tregantle 1958 – 1961
By Geoff Malthouse with additions by Roy Venables

Our annual camp was at Fort Tregantle near the village of Antony where we were based. Tregantle is in "God's County", Cornwall just outside the town of Torpoint, where the car ferry links Cornwall and Devon.

What I want to do is retrace our route and where we camped out (bivouacked*)* on the moor at night, if we ever did.

The starting point, which most observers agree, was Cheesewring on Stowe's Hill (North of Darite). Cheeswring is the formation of stacked rocks that look like a double hamburger. Or in this case a Cheesburger? The actual place was more correctly known as Stowe's Hill. Definite places I remember were; Brown Willy and Rough Tor. On the route were; King Arthur's Bed, Dozmary Pool, and Jamaica Inn (which was out of bounds). It is apparent to me now, that the crossings each year had different routes, although the main places mentioned seem to be common to all.



Jamaica Inn, which was an old coaching inn, was a bleak stone building, but very warm and friendly inside. (Not that we saw the inside as a junior - true). I called in one year while touring Cornwall and have some postcards of the interior too. I did feel as if I was entering a 'forbidden zone' even in later life! The name conjures up many images of the wild past of smuggling on the moor - Daphne DuMaurier's novels, 'Frenchman's Creek' and Rebecca', etc. Lorna Doone.



Jamaica Inn

In my year we all started at Cheesewrings and were timed out as patrols. The section leader was called, given the first RV and off we went, still trying to find out where we were going. Some gambled and followed the earlier section but had to divert when they realised their error. I think we had different routes and criss-crossed all over the moor to keep us apart. In fact we rarely saw anybody else the whole time we were out, apart from at the RV's such as Brown Willy and Rough Tor, etc.

I recall when we got off the moor we went and camped near Tintagel above a steep cliff down to a small rocky bay with the waves crashing in. This was close to King Arthur's Castle. *(Or was this the halfway point?)*

In Bill Chamberlain's memories he recalls about Bodmin Moor;

"The Cheesewring was the start and I am sure we passed through St Breward, skirted Dozmary Pool, with the first bivouac on Rough Tor and then down onto the Camelford road,

on via Rockhead, Trebarwith and down to Trabarwith Strand. Dip in the icy sea. Return via Brown Willy."

'We got a lift around Valley T in a flat back wagon, which lives in the memory or rather the stench does...!!!'

"It was bloody marshy between Rough Tor and the Camelford road, meant having to circumnavigate via Trecarne and then on to Valley Truckle."

"I can recall most of my two trecs over Bodmin, my memory was initially hazy as to the point on the coast where we met up with JJ Thompson and had to take a swim, as there had been a few suggestions. "

"I was in two minds and Capt Thompson, & Chris McHale confirmed it was Trebarwith Strand."

"When we returned via Brown Willy , to the best of my knowledge the return point was somewhere north of Bolventor and and the Cheeserings"

Geoff comments:

Bolventer is where Jamaica Inn was, so Bill's route, a year earlier, must have been a bit different? Jamaica Inn was out of bounds because (apart from being a pub) was where some of the permanent staff were holed up. Pencarrow and Valley Truckle are just to the South of Camelford. Rockhead and Trebarwith are the villages on a direct line between Camelford and Trebarwith Strand.

Roy Venables remembers:

The little party of which I was a member got no perks or free rides and I think we dutifully followed the prescribed route as best we could.

"I`m fairly sure that we went into the sea at Trebarwith Strand and if I had been asked, I would have said the route was circular with the plunge in the sea taking place mid way."

"I remember no training, simply getting into a 3 tonner and being dropped somewhere - did groups get dropped off at different points along the circuit perhaps, so as to keep them separate?" " We used dry stone walls in fields as one side of our rudimentary shelters."

"We had no sleeping bags or proper rucksacks, relying on the standard of the day of groundsheets and blankets and 37 pattern web equipment large packs. I remember washing my feet in a clear stream and a sense of being off the leash for a few days."

"There was a supervisory team of permanent who went around the area in Land Rovers on the main roads and others on the Tors we passed through. Apparently they manned defective No88 Sets according to Captain John K Heads a House Officer. It did not occur to me then or since that there were people like Captain Head with inadequate communication equipment, actually trying to actually control matters."

"As I mentioned earlier I recall asking locals for directions to Rough Tor and receiving blank looks until it dawned that their "Row ter" was the dialect way to pronounce the name."

"I have been trying to recall who I was with on the Long March, but with no success. Would we have been in groups of about 5 or 6 and were they democratically run? "

"The weather for the most part (1958) was good and the scenery to me seemed spectacular with lovely villages and pleasant locals. St Breward sits vaguely in my mind as one village on the route."

Geoff continues:

Trebarwith Strand is just south of Tintagel whilst Boscastle is just a bit further north. But we seem in the right area. I hadn't realised that Boscastle, the place where that dreadful flood disaster happened, was close to where we stayed.

It is incredible how we safely crossed that moor with the equipment that they issued us. The main thing I remember was that woollen hat/scarf that we rolled up and folded into a 'commando like' hat and probably the 38 pattern Large Pack. I think we also got a flimsy waterproof with a hood but that is all we got. The rest we had to scrounge/beg/borrow, and yes, probably steal for ourselves.

We did do some pre exercise training. Field cooking and bivouac making at the top of the sports field. Then we had a weekend exercise to practice our skills probably around Ash ranges area. We were taught map reading in education classes. We used the service prismatic compass and those white rectangle ivorine protractors. No Silva compasses around in those days.

The bivouac was made by threading together our capes/groundsheets and we were not given an extra one for the floor. I think we even had to scrounge the string! They gave us nothing! We managed to bring back some poles cut from the woods to string our bivvies to. Some used dry stone walls in fields to build their bivouac against. There are photos showing some doing just that on Rough Tor. Those large stones with the horizontal cap stone were in fact a 'Quoit', which is an ancient burial place. They might have been less keen to use them if they knew that.

The incredible thing is that although the staff knew quite well we needed poles for the moor and you don't get wood on the moor, they wouldn't let us keep them in the barrack room. If they found them in our lockers they would say 'what's this!' 'It's not on the kit layout picture!', 'Get it out!' ??????

It's incredible no one got lost or badly injured. One of the lessons I carried for the rest of my service, and I still have it, is a tobacco tin containing the emergency kit. Never did find a use for it though. Thankfully. But never had the heart to dismantle it.

I also learnt to keep to high ground as much as possible. Once gained, never go downhill unless you can avoid it, until the objective is in sight. Hard, but wonderful times.

The place where we rested 'in that area', wherever it was, not far off the old castle remains below the rocks and coves of Tintagel, I think.....

Anyway, it was a marvellous place. We climbed down a very steep cliff face path into a very small bay and the Atlantic was crashing into the surrounding rocks. Quite spectacular. On that day there was a great log floating between the sides of the cove (which were sheer cliff) and we were swimming out to it and riding it in! Sheer folly. Unsupervised, unprotected, but

that's how it was in those days. If someone got hurt, it was their fault! We didn't have the culture of finding someone to blame.

In fact that was a feature of our training in the Junior Leaders. You never blamed anyone. It was always down to you. But we helped each other. When asked why you had failed to do some thing, you automatically said, 'No excuse, Sir'

On the Moor we cooked using the Hexamine Stove. They were those little tin folding metal stands and a lump of hexamine which you called 'fire lighters'. I don't recall a problem with matches. We probably even had some spare dry ones in our 'emergency tobacco tin'. After all we all smoked in those days, so no doubt we were especially careful with the lights for our ciggies.

There was always an argument on whose mess kits would be used to cook up the food because they would end up in a sticky charred mess. To get them clean enough to eat from was quite a chore, and to get them back to a barrack room shine, hours of work with a Brillo pad and Brasso many weeks after the exercise.

We ate as we always did in those days, good old British Army Compo. There was always a scramble for the various packs. Some better than others. We were supposed to get a different type each day to get a variety and balanced meals.

One of the favourites was the A pack. It contained salmon and other delectables but not much substance in them. One of the least popular was a pack which had Irish stew in. (The 'C' Pack?) We seemed to get a lot of that stuff but at least it was a substantial meal and kept us going. Of course we had plenty of those packets of Army Biscuits, 'hard tack'. Often ignored for the first few days but appreciated later on in the week when we go hungry. A packet of hard tack and a tin of 'bully beef' and you thought you were in heaven!

There was also a utility pack in every pack that provided the important roll of toilet paper, the can opener and a little piece of paper which was entitled ' Read First'! Although we rarely read it, it gave all the menus and cooking instructions the pack contained. There was matches and boiled sweets, which were also quite nice.

I well remember the tinned bacon. It was rubbish and no reward for all the effort to unroll and cook it. I loved those tinned sausages and have always enjoyed them since but I haven't seen any for a long time. The cheese and margarine improved only after being deprived from good food for a couple of days or so. Then was excellent with a packet of hard tack. This was probably the first days of owning one of those ubiquitous little folding can openers which from then on were permanently attached to our key rings.

One other thing we were issued with was a pack of water purification tablets, again rarely used.

Roy Venables comments:
"The only other delicacies I remember now were the tinned cheese, which was fine when you got hungry enough, and super dark chocolate with raisins which came with some boiled sweets in a tin." "Never seen tinned cheese since those days, it did become pleasant, when you became hungry enough, after a few days". "I also recall climbing hills and thinking "It will be fine when we get to the top, only keep on" and then finding at the brow that a fresh hill was revealed and so on and so on."

Geoff continues: I recall one day while on the moor, it rained. And it rained. We were soaked through to the skin. We were so cold and wet we stood ankle deep in a stream, under a small hump backed bridge, for some respite from the relentless driving rain. God knows how we managed to dry out. No help from the permanent staff. Sympathy in those days was a word in the dictionary that comes after sh't and just before syphilis.

One year three boys did get lost for a few days. There was quite some concern but they turned up about two days late none the worse. Apparently they had got lost and knocked on a remote farm house for help. They were put up in the farm barn and there was a farmer's daughter..... so the story went at the time. One was a boy Sgt (Taffy H'- I'll not disclose him to spare his blushes) but after the usual rumours of what was or wasn't going to happen to him, all was forgiven and died down.

There were some pre training exercises where we got dropped off from a 3 tonner. Bill Chamberlain talks about one. I did one in Wales. Crossed the Black Mountains, Coltwolds and Chilterns that way. Dropped off, march to a RV, pick up a lift to somewhere else, dropped off, etc. I think they called them 'Chindit' marches?

Roy Venables recalls "We were issued as Jun Ldrs with blue woolen swimming 'cozzies' and these items were carried across Bodmin Moor to facilitate the dip in the sea at Trebarwith Strand which I simply recall as being cold and wet rather than spectacular. These items were taken away when you were issued with BDs for mans service. Additionally I seem to recall being issued with some knee length underpants named "John L Sullivans" which were never worn, remaining neatly folded for kit inspections."

"The rooms at Tregantle Fort had very deep windows in which numerous lads could sit. "We were at Fort Tregantle for two weeks and I think the march occupied most of one week." "We went into Plymouth at one stage and I remember looking out over Whitsand Bay out to sea". "Tregantle too seemed an amazing place to my boyhood mind."

Geoff continues:

I can't remember the room allocation in Tregantle or even the make up of the marching teams on the moor. I do remember that I was involved in the map reading although I suppose we were all, to some extent or another. This for me, created a life long interest in maps and map reading and all the peripheral instruments in map making and using. I have a nice collection of maps, books, protractors, and compasses. I even have a service compass although I suspect it is of Indian origin.

Tregantle Fort was quite enormous. I thought it was a left over from the Napoleonic Wars. I have recently read, "The fort formed the outer line of defence for Plymouth and was designed to hold 35 guns". "It was completed in 1865 following the news that the French Navy was building iron-clad warships."
There certainly was a lot of stone or concrete in the walls.

The rooms were accessible via a long dimly lit corridor and had high barrel shaped ceilings. I think they were lime washed although probably flaking. Again the rooms were not very bright either. There was no furniture except for the folding iron bedstead with a hard three piece mattress?

Our kit was stored in our kitbags and yes there was a kit layout we had to comply with. Yes we learned that there was actually a way of packing the kit bag in a certain order so that you could find anything.

The large, high windows, you recall Roy, were at the wall end towards the fort quadrangle.

There are pictures on the Internet of a recent Cadet Camp which show the rooms somewhat decorated?

While in the fort the boys mounted a full royal type guard. We wore blancoed 37 pattern webbing. There was a stickman to be competed for, and if you got selected you were able to run messages for the guard until midnight, then you could get your head down all night.

They played the game of 'Stand to the Guard' every time a field officer approached, so we had to hang about the guardroom when not on sentry with your kit on, ready to fall in outside the guardroom door. Quite a game it was and I don't think we got any rest the next day either.

While we were at Tregantle the Drums and Bugles had a number of engagements culminating with beating the retreat in Plymouth. I notice latter photographs of the band, the absence of bugles and what appeared to me as those marching glockenspiels?

Scotty on the ROL Forum wrote, "Before the road bridge was built in 1962, the ferry and Isembard Brunnel's rail bridge was the only links from Plymouth to Cornwall. Tregantle Fort closed last year as an accommodation/training camp. The only thing now in use is the ranges."