

Cranmere Pool

Anne Williamson

Cranmere Pool, described so powerfully in *Tarka the Otter*, is on Dartmoor, map ref. OS Sheet 191, SX603858. The Visitor's Book for 1926 contains the following interesting entry which Devon Library Services (Plymouth, Local Studies Dept.) have kindly given us permission to reproduce.



Henry Williamson came here on
30 March 1926, to take notes
for "Tarka the Otter"; and spurred
a big dog out of a boggy hollow
210 yards S.S.W. from the Pool—
which an old map is called CRAWMERE.
With alone came R. E. Hibbert.

This is our second attempt.
Last time we were caught in a haze
of shells.



The Librarian also sent some extracts from various books giving the history and folklore of Cranmere. That of Eric Hemery, *High Dartmoor* (1983), being the most comprehensive and the source of the following information.

The origin of the name apparently derives from Crane's Mere (on Dartmoor the heron was called crane — pool being an unnecessary addition). This mere, formed in a peat bog, was once quite large and deep and was quoted in 1826 as a 'morass of red bog and rushes'. In 1844 it was breached possibly by a shepherd who may have found the tarn dangerous for his sheep, or perhaps by digging out a terrier trapped in a fox's earth, and the pool has not contained water since. Visitors have long been taken there by guides; the first record being on 11 August 1789 when John Andrews recorded in his diary that he paid 2.0s for a guide and horse, and 6d to a 'man who went to Cranmere Pool'. In 1854 James Perrott of Chagford set up a small cairn incorporating a bottle where those who had met the challenge could place their visiting cards. Charles Dickens was among their number. A tin box followed, and the first actual 'post-box' was installed in 1912. The present arrangement was organised by *The Western Morning News* in 1937.