# Supreme Court ruling secures wild camping rights on Dartmoor against landowner opposition



Gentle bird song and the soothing sound of water flowing over boulders greet those who choose to wake at dawn on Dartmoor. The pale-yellow light of early spring casts a warm glow over the expansive, rugged terrain, encompassing not only solitude but also moments of profound peace and blissful contentment. For many, these experiences in nature are priceless; however, they have faced challenges due to legal tussles concerning wild camping rights.

The recent landmark ruling by the Supreme Court is a significant victory for outdoor enthusiasts. The court decided against the arguments posed by Alexander and Diana Darwall, who claimed that wild camping was detrimental to their conservation efforts and posed risks to livestock on their sprawling estate. The judges determined that the Dartmoor Commons Act of 1985 encompasses a broader definition of "open-air recreation," including wild camping, thus allowing this cherished practice to continue unimpeded.

This decisive ruling ensures that Dartmoor retains its unique position in England as the only area where wild camping can occur without requiring the landowner's permission. This exceptional right has become a focal point for those advocating for greater public access to natural spaces across the country. The contrast with Scotland, where wild camping is largely unrestricted so long as campers avoid enclosed land, highlights the need for reform in England, where outdoor enthusiasts must often navigate a patchwork of restrictions.

Campaigners are optimistic that the court's ruling will inspire a shift in policy, especially within Labour, who have proposed extending the right to roam over all English national parks. Such an expansion could significantly increase public access to nature, providing more opportunities for recreation and connection with the outdoors. The Dartmoor case exemplifies a growing recognition of the importance of public access to natural heritage, a principle that dates back to the post-war period when national parks were established to offer escape and recreation to a public emerging from the devastation of war.

As the sunlight bathes the steep, tussock-clad valleys, hikers often find themselves experiencing a sense of exhilaration that commercial camping sites cannot replicate. The absence of facilities fosters a deeper connection to nature, where campers must adhere to the principles of "Leave No Trace," leaving the environment unburdened by human presence. While some reports have highlighted irresponsible camping practices, the wider challenge of environmental conservation is often exacerbated by certain landowners who neglect ecological responsibilities.

Indeed, Dartmoor faces pressing environmental issues, such as overgrazing, particularly by sheep, which threatens local biodiversity. This reality underscores the calls for responsible stewardship of land on both sides of the debate. While fly camping—where large groups leave behind waste—has emerged as a concern during the pandemic, it pales in comparison to the broader ecological challenges driven by intensive land management practices.

Referring to the resilience of public sentiment in favour of wild camping, past protests in response to initial court decisions illustrate the collective demand for access rights. The thousands who rallied to defend the right to wild camp represent a significant movement advocating for outdoor freedom. Their collective efforts had at last culminated in the Supreme Court's favourable decision, ensuring that Dartmoor’s wild spaces remain accessible to all.

In an era where nature is increasingly threatened, the ruling is not merely a victory for wild campers; it signals a deeper societal shift towards valuing and protecting natural spaces for generations to come. For those who venture into Dartmoor's moorland, rivers, and woodlands, the experience is one of freedom and adventure, offering a refreshing embrace of the wild.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/23/blissful-isolation-wild-camping-on-dartmoor-to-celebrate-a-protected-right), [[3]](https://news.sky.com/story/wild-camping-ban-on-dartmoor-lifted-after-landowners-lose-court-case-12931301)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/23/blissful-isolation-wild-camping-on-dartmoor-to-celebrate-a-protected-right), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jul/31/wild-camping-dartmoor-court-appeal), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/apr/05/hope-for-wild-camping-on-dartmoor-as-national-park-wins-right-to-appeal-ban)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2023-07-31/court-of-appeal-gives-green-light-for-wild-camping-on-dartmoor), [[6]](https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2023-01-27/dartmoor-national-park-to-appeal-against-high-court-ruling-on-wild-camping)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/23/blissful-isolation-wild-camping-on-dartmoor-to-celebrate-a-protected-right), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/aug/04/labour-would-extend-right-to-wild-camp-to-all-english-national-parks)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/23/blissful-isolation-wild-camping-on-dartmoor-to-celebrate-a-protected-right), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jul/31/wild-camping-dartmoor-court-appeal), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/apr/05/hope-for-wild-camping-on-dartmoor-as-national-park-wins-right-to-appeal-ban)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/23/blissful-isolation-wild-camping-on-dartmoor-to-celebrate-a-protected-right), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jul/31/wild-camping-dartmoor-court-appeal), [[5]](https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2023-07-31/court-of-appeal-gives-green-light-for-wild-camping-on-dartmoor)
* Paragraph 7 – [[3]](https://news.sky.com/story/wild-camping-ban-on-dartmoor-lifted-after-landowners-lose-court-case-12931301), [[6]](https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2023-01-27/dartmoor-national-park-to-appeal-against-high-court-ruling-on-wild-camping)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/23/blissful-isolation-wild-camping-on-dartmoor-to-celebrate-a-protected-right> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jul/31/wild-camping-dartmoor-court-appeal> - This article reports on the successful appeal by the Dartmoor National Park Authority, which reinstated the right to wild camp on Dartmoor. The Court of Appeal ruled that wild camping is a form of 'open-air recreation' under the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985, overturning a previous High Court decision that had banned the practice. The ruling ensures that Dartmoor remains the only place in England where wild camping is legal without landowner permission.
3. <https://news.sky.com/story/wild-camping-ban-on-dartmoor-lifted-after-landowners-lose-court-case-12931301> - Sky News covers the Court of Appeal's decision to lift the ban on wild camping in Dartmoor National Park. The article details the legal battle initiated by landowners Alexander and Diana Darwall, who argued that wild camping posed risks to livestock and the environment. The Court of Appeal's ruling reaffirms the public's right to camp on Dartmoor without landowner consent, highlighting the park's unique status in England regarding wild camping rights.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/apr/05/hope-for-wild-camping-on-dartmoor-as-national-park-wins-right-to-appeal-ban> - This piece discusses the Dartmoor National Park Authority's successful bid to appeal a High Court ruling that had banned wild camping. The article outlines the legal arguments presented by both sides and the potential implications for public access to Dartmoor. It also highlights the support from various campaigners and organizations advocating for the right to wild camp in the national park.
5. <https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2023-07-31/court-of-appeal-gives-green-light-for-wild-camping-on-dartmoor> - ITV News reports on the Court of Appeal's decision granting the right to wild camp in Dartmoor National Park. The article provides insights into the legal proceedings, including the arguments from both the Dartmoor National Park Authority and the landowners. It also touches upon the broader context of public access rights and the significance of the ruling for outdoor enthusiasts.
6. <https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2023-01-27/dartmoor-national-park-to-appeal-against-high-court-ruling-on-wild-camping> - This report details the Dartmoor National Park Authority's announcement to appeal a High Court ruling that prohibited wild camping without landowner permission. The article covers the background of the case, the perspectives of both the park authority and the landowners, and the potential impact of the ruling on public access to Dartmoor.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/aug/04/labour-would-extend-right-to-wild-camp-to-all-english-national-parks> - The Guardian discusses the Labour Party's proposal to extend the right to wild camp to all English national parks. The article examines the implications of the Dartmoor ruling and the party's stance on public access to natural spaces. It also includes reactions from various stakeholders and campaigners advocating for broader access rights.