# Supreme Court ruling secures wild camping rights on Dartmoor against private estate owners



Gentle bird song and the soothing gurgle of water flowing over boulders create a symphony of tranquillity that greets the dawn in Dartmoor. The spring sun, though still hidden, casts a soft, golden glow over the rugged valleys, where solitude reigns, offering respite from the chaos of daily life. It is within this serene setting that many find moments of blissful contentment in nature, treasured experiences that have recently come under threat.

In the backdrop of this natural splendour lies a significant legal battle instigated by Alexander and Diana Darwall, owners of a vast estate bordering the moor. They claimed that wild camping—notably the act of pitching tents without landowner consent—was hindering their conservation efforts and potentially endangering their cattle. Their argument culminated in a legal challenge that sought to restrict public access to the moor, insisting that the legislation allowing “open-air recreation” pertained solely to activities such as walking and horse riding.

However, the recent Supreme Court ruling has delivered a decisive blow to this narrative, establishing that recreation encompasses a broader scope, including wild camping. This landmark decision solidifies Dartmoor’s unique status as the only location in England where wild camping is permitted without prior permission from landowners. Rather than seeking permission from the Darwalls to camp on the open moorland near their grand residence, the decision empowers individuals to immerse themselves in the wild. As one hiker noted, the sense of freedom derived from such experiences is invigorating, offering a stark contrast to the often crowded conditions of commercial campsites.

Dartmoor’s ruling is not merely a local victory; it has the potential to resonate nationwide. Campaigners pushing for enhanced access to the countryside hope this legal precedent will galvanise political action, particularly from the Labour Party. Their past promises of expanding the right to roam could be rekindled as the government considers how to balance public enjoyment with responsible land stewardship. Comparisons are drawn to Scotland, where legislation provides greater latitude for camping away from enclosed lands, highlighting the disparity in access rights across the UK.

Amidst these discussions, the environmental implications of current land practices cannot be overlooked. Dartmoor is not immune to the pressures of wildlife decline, with significant overgrazing by sheep threatening vital ecosystems. This issue is compounded by the broader context of the climate crisis, which has seen an alarming number of species across the UK facing extinction. Critics, including environmental advocates, have noted that the irresponsible practices of certain landowners can have a more detrimental impact than the actions of the small minority of campers who might leave behind litter.

On the ground, hikers traversing the moor's rugged beauty increasingly report a lack of litter, a testament to responsible camping. The only signs of neglect encountered on trails often stem from agricultural practices rather than outdoor enthusiasts. This emphasis on respect for nature is mirrored in the widespread community activism that arose following Darwall’s initial court victory in 2023, sparking one of the largest countryside access protests in the UK. The movement united thousands in defense of Dartmoor's cultural and ecological heritage, ensuring that this precious landscape remained accessible to all.

As sunlight pours into the valleys of Dartmoor, the interplay of nature and adventure reaffirms the essential connection between people and the wild. In a landscape steeped in history and beauty, the triumph for wild camping is not simply a legal victory but an affirmation of the right to engage with nature in its most authentic form—a reminder that the spirit of exploration and conservation can coexist for the benefit of both the land and its visitors.

## 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)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/23/blissful-isolation-wild-camping-on-dartmoor-to-celebrate-a-protected-right),
* Paragraph 3 – ,
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/23/blissful-isolation-wild-camping-on-dartmoor-to-celebrate-a-protected-right),
* Paragraph 5 –
* Paragraph 6 – ,

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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