

QUANTOCK DRAGON QUEST

INTRODUCTION:

The Quantock Hills are rich in myths and legends, such as the gruesome story of the 'Gert Vurm', or Shervage Dragon. This tale is the basis for an imaginative, cross-curricular investigation which follows the Woodcutter's legendary route from Crowcombe to dragon-infested Shervage Wood.

This Unit was originally devised by local teacher and Quantock enthusiast, Judith Fursland. Judy was for many years the head teacher of Lydeard St Lawrence Primary School, on the edge of the Quantock Hills. Under her inspiring leadership, pupils experienced many memorable learning adventures, and the 'Gert Vurm' investigation encapsulates her creative approach to learning from and engaging with the environment.

Further ideas grew out of an INSET day for local teachers in 2004, based at Kilve Court Outdoor Education Centre, as part of the Quantock Education Project (QEd). The resultant 'Quantock Dragon Quest' pack is a collaboration between Judith Fursland and Rachel Shaw (Heritage Education consultant), with help from Iain Porter, Development officer for the Quantock Hills AONB service.

The pack was designed for use with Key Stage 2 children, but aspects of the pack could be used with Key Stages 1 or 3. It fosters both creativity and logical skills, stimulating imaginative responses, and original thinking, debate and discussion, and can be developed within many curriculum areas.

Prepared by Judy Fursland and Rachel Shaw for Quantock Hills AONB Service, 2006

Except where otherwise indicated, the material in this pack can be copied for school use only.

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VISITING DEAD WOMAN'S DITCH & SHERVAGE

Dead Woman's Ditch has been so called for many years. The origin of the ditch is thought to be Iron Age, and it was probably a fortification that linked in with Dowsborough Hill Fort to the north. Dowsborough Fort is a defensive earthwork that covers just under 7 acres and is enclosed by a ditch and rampart 15ft (5m) high. It is now covered by Sessile Oak woodland, which has 'invaded' from the valley below.

To the south is Great Wood, a coniferous plantation managed by Forestry Commission on land leased from Somerset County Council. It has been managed by the Forestry Commission since 1922 and is a productive conifer forest mainly consisting of Douglas Fir and Sitka Spruce.

To the north west is the main Quantock Common, the majority of which is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The common is 1831Ha in size and is made up of Upland Sessile Oak Woodland and Lowland Heath. These habitats are a haven for many rare birds, such as the Dartford Wabbler, plants (Ling Heather) and reptiles, such as the Adder, and the shy Red Deer.

Shervage Wood:

Shervage Wood lies at the northern end of the Quantock Hills where the rolling heathlands drop to meet the surrounding farmland. The woods are mainly Upland Sessile Oak woodlands with ground cover of Whortleberries, holly and grass.

How to get there:

Directions:

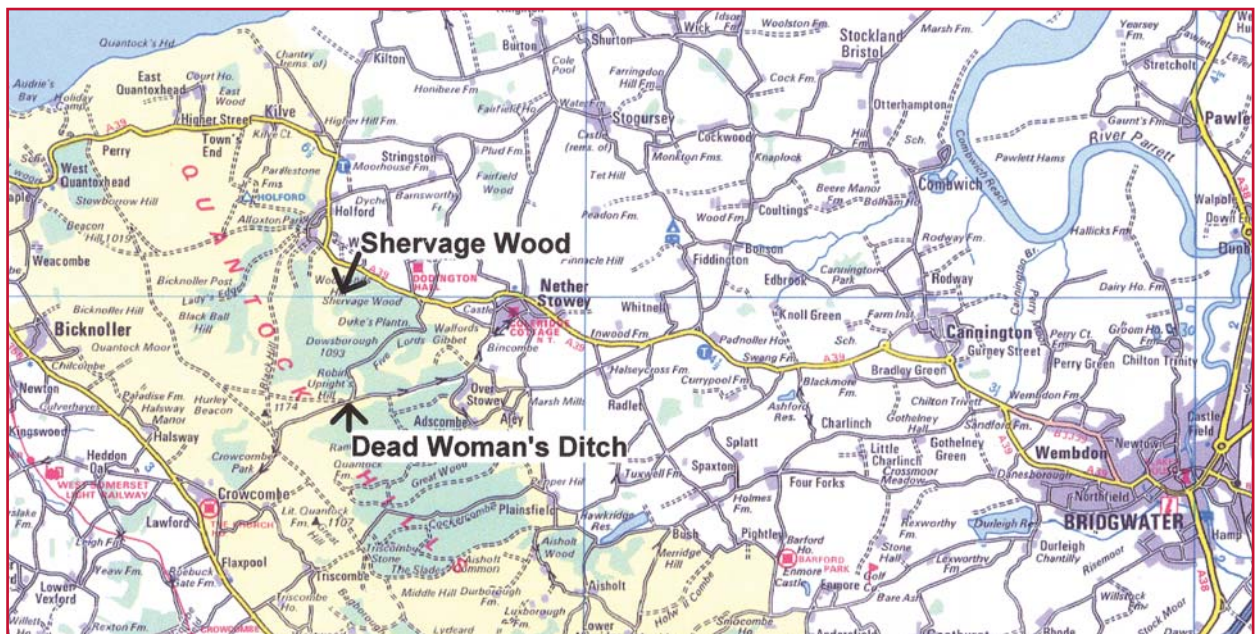
From the east follow the A358 until coming to signs for Crowcombe. Go into the village of Crowcombe and take the turning opposite the public car park, signed for Nether Stowey. Follow this up the hill and across a cattle grid. After approximately 2 miles you will come to Dead Woman's Ditch car park on your right.

From the west follow the A39 towards Williton. Take the second exit for Nether Stowey (at the traffic lights turning left) and take the right turn after approximately 50m. Follow this road until coming to Bincombe Green (the name will be on the highway sign collar) where the road forks. Take the right hand fork for approximately 40m and then continue on going uphill. After approximately 400m you will pass over a cattle grid onto Quantock Common. Continue along this road for 1.7km until coming to Dead Woman's Ditch car park on your left.

To continue onto Shervage Woods take the road opposite the entrance to Dead Woman's Ditch car park, signed to Dodington and Holford. Follow this lane until coming to the A39 and turn left. Follow the A39 for approximately 2.0km and turn left into a National Trust car park (bare earth). Shervage Woods is a short walk from the car park.

Facilities:

There are no facilities on site. Nearest public toilets are outside the library building, Nether Stowey.



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SITE HEALTH & SAFETY REVIEW

Leaders Name:	
Activity:	Dead Woman's Ditch & Shervage Woods Site Visit
Date & Time:	

First Aid Provision:		
Lone Working Procedures:		
Emergency Procedures:		
Incident reporting Procedures:		
Identified Hazards	Who is at risk?	Risks from hazards (high, medium, low) (Include how they will be managed)
Vehicles in car park	Students & Leaders	Low. Low. Supervise students when in car park. Move onto grass area near beach quickly.
Route Surface	Students & Leaders	Low. Route survey carried out twice a year by AONB Service staff. Any problems found with route to be reported as earliest possible time to AONB Service.
Weather	Students & Leaders	Low. Leader to be aware of weather for visit. Up to date weather reports can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/weather
Roads	Students & Leaders	Low. Leaders to be aware of students near roads. Move in small groups.

Conditions:

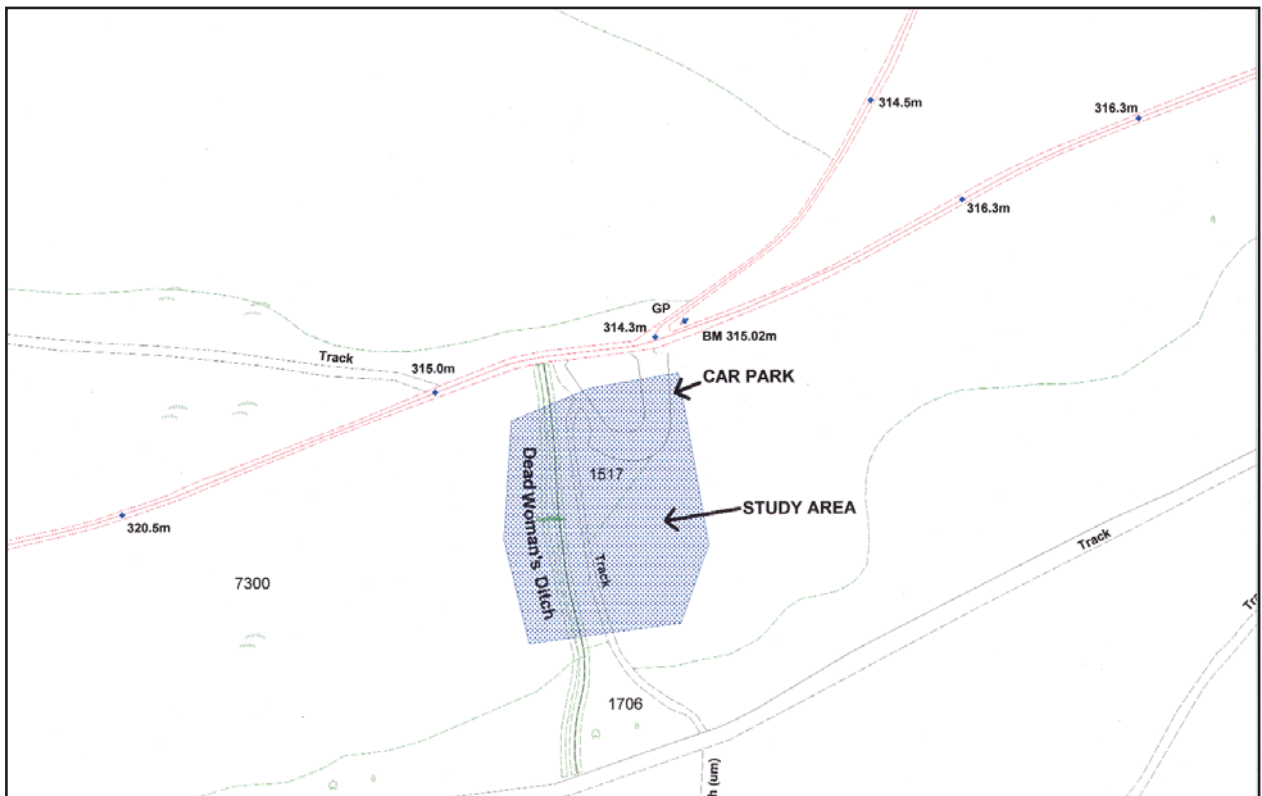
1. This form is for visits that fall outside the CDM Regulations.
2. The leader is aware and agrees to comply with all Health & Safety Legislation.
3. All accidents should be reported to the event leader with 24 hours.

Signed and agreed as an accurate statement of Health & Safety matters
Signed on behalf of
(School)
Dated

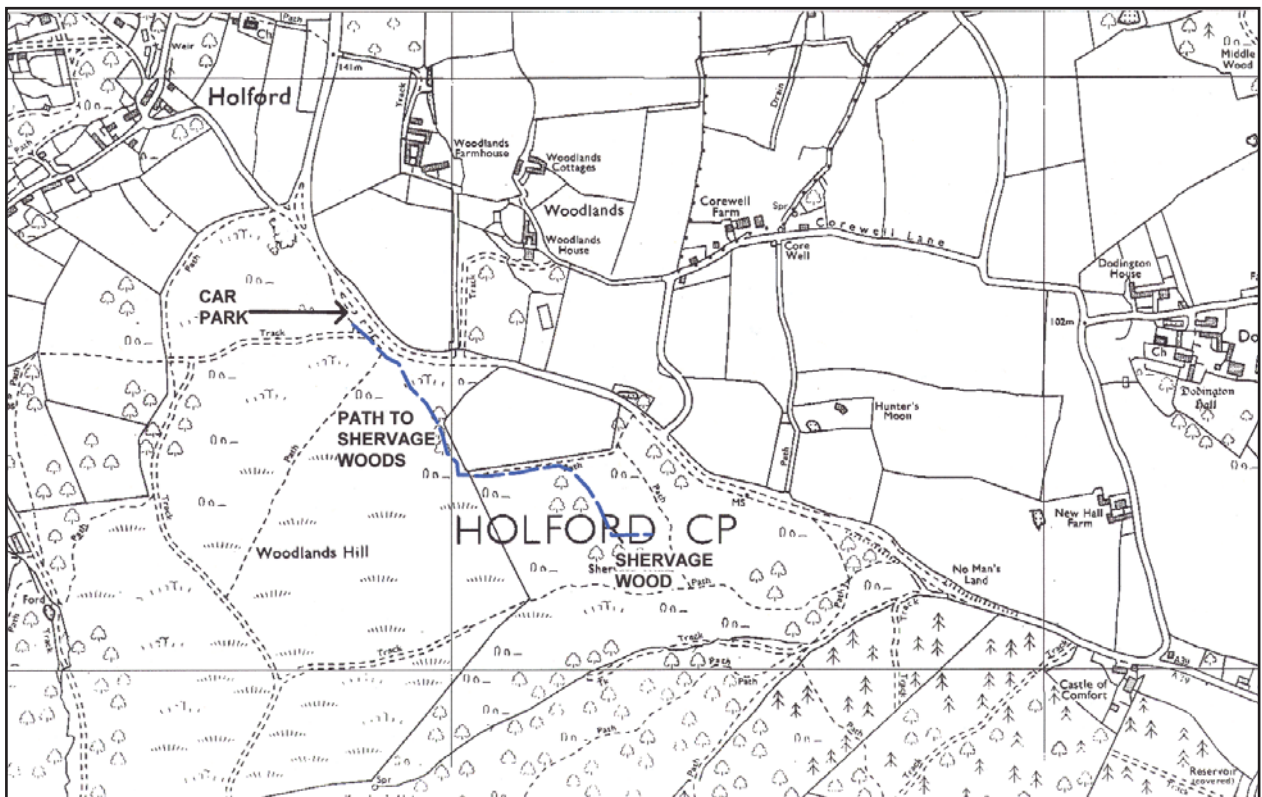
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SITE PLANS

Dead Woman's Ditch Site plan



Shervage Wood Site plan



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STRUCTURE OF THE QUANTOCK DRAGON QUEST

Planning the activities

Starting point....



..which begs a **BIG 'QUEST'-ION..**

Is it true?
Did it really happen
like this?

..which stimulates **LOTS OF
SMALLER 'QUEST'-IONS..**



..that could be answered out by
LOOKING FOR MORE EVIDENCE...

**Plan an investigation,
following a particular
line of enquiry**

..and then coming to a
CONCLUSION, based on the
balance of probability.

TRUE

FALSE

or somewhere inbetween

You can adapt this framework to suit the circumstances, and angle it to any part of the curriculum.
It is structured to encourage logical thinking skills and also to stretch the imagination.

UNIT OF WORK - QUANTOCK DRAGON QUEST

DEAD WOMAN'S DITCH & SHERVAGE WOOD

A creative, cross-curricular unit of work for KS1 & 2

ABOUT THE UNIT

This Unit is built around an investigation of Shervage Wood, the location of the ancient 'Gert Vorm' legend. It was developed by Judith Fursland, working with a mixed KS1/2 class at Lydeard St. Lawrence Primary School. For them, the journey from Crowcombe to Shervage Wood via Dead Woman's Ditch was integral, but the ideas and resources included here could be adapted and used elsewhere.

The Unit aims to encourage creativity and thinking skills, and follows a logical process of investigation within a fantastical framework. It gives the pupils scope to define and develop their own line of enquiry.

It links most obviously with English, Geography, History, Science, Numeracy and Technology and can support work within any of these curriculum areas.

The work described would take at least one teaching session to prepare, one to follow up and at least half a day's fieldwork. It could easily be adapted to cover weekly sessions over half a term, or longer. It works best with some timetable flexibility.

ENGLISH

Opportunities for:

- Speaking and Listening
- Discussion and Interaction
- Drama
- Storytelling
- Creative Writing
- Myths and Legends

GEOGRAPHICAL SKILLS

- Ask geographical questions
- Observe and question
- Collect and record evidence
- Analyse and communicate
- Use geographical vocabulary
- Undertake fieldwork
- Use maps and plans

HISTORY

Opportunities to develop

- chronological understanding
- knowledge and understanding
- historical understanding and enquiry
- link with Local History Unit

SCIENCE

Opportunities for:

- Investigative skills
- Considering evidence and evaluating
- Habitat, Adaptation, Food chains, Movement,
- Physical processes: flight

PRIOR LEARNING

It is helpful if the children have:

- some experience of working outside
- familiarity with some traditional folk stories
- some knowledge and understanding of traditional rural life

RESOURCES

- appropriate recording equipment for the investigation, eg clipboard, collecting bags, camera
- local large scale maps
- 'props' for story enactment on site
- copies of pupil sheets from this pack, as required.

VOCABULARY

In this unit, children have opportunities to use:

- technical words: hills, coombe, tracks, trails, village, vegetation, living things, habitat, lair, prey, predator, legend, fuel, resources, evidence, traditional, belief, ancient, medieval, oral, hamlet, glide, camouflage
- local, archaic or dialect words eg wortleberry, nummach
- words to evoke atmosphere and express mood

Expectations

By the end of this unit, children will have:

- critically examined the Somerset legend of the Shervage Dragon in a dramatic setting
- learned that the Quantock Hills have changed over time and seen evidence for this
- found out that life was different in the middle ages and people saw the world differently
- devised and followed their own line of enquiry, gathering and evaluating evidence at a level appropriate to their ability.

TEACHING PLAN

Learning objectives Pupils should:	Possible learning activities	Relevant Attainment Targets	Resources
1. FAMILIARISATION Children to be familiar with the legend of the Gert Vorm, Start to think around the story in different ways,	Children read or tell the story, having shared their local myths and legends and discussed oral tradition Drama. Hot seating of main characters: Nether Stowey grooms, locals, Stogumber woodman, wife of Crowcombe. Mapwork, following the Woodman's assumed journey. Stogumber > Crowcombe > Dead Woman's Ditch > Shervage Wood. What materials would have been available to build the dwellings? Investigate local materials in class collection. Investigate Dragon lore. What local evidence would, historically, have led local people to believe in dragons?	KS1 En1 a-f; 2a-f KS2 En1 a-f; 2a-c KS1 Hist 1 ab, 2ab, 3, 4ab, 5, 6b KS2 Hist 1 ab, 2acd, 3, 4ab, 5abc, 6, 7 KS1 En 3a-e, 4abc, 8ab, 9ab, 10b, 11ab. KS2 En 1 3a-f, 4a-d, 6b, 8, 9, 10, 11. KS1 Geo 1a-d, 2a-e, 3a-d. KS2 Geo 1ab, 2bcde, 3bcg. KS1 Sc3 1a-d, 2ab. KS2 Sc3 1ab, 2ace. KS1 En2 1mn, 2abc, 3bdf, 6abcfg, 7ab. KS2 En2 1d, 2abd, 3a-f, 4acf, 8c, 9c.	Resource sheet 1, 'Gert Vorm': The story retold. Resource sheet 2, Sheet: 'The Woodcutter' OS map of Quantock Hills (Explorer sheet 140), Resource Sheet 3, Map of Route to Shervage Wood [QEd website: Quantoxyclopedia pages: building materials] Resource Sheet Photo of dragon bench end. [QEd website: Quantoxyclopedia pages: fossils]
2. FIELDWORK Visit Shervage Wood (can be via Stogumber, Crowcombe and Dead Woman's Ditch)	SEE FIELDWORK ACTIVITY GUIDE FOR DETAILS OF VISIT AND ROUTE See page XX		Maps, dramatic props, collecting bags, cameras etc.
3. GENERATING AND FORMULATING FURTHER QUESTION Review visit as appropriate. Children to agree further questions and plan possible tasks.	SEE 'EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE 'QUESTIONS' FOR GUIDANCE See page XX		Pupil Sheet: 'Quantock Dragon Quest'
4. COMPLETING INVESTIGATIONS Collect, record and process information, Draw conclusions and share findings			Pupil Sheet: Dragon Frame

ROUTE AND ACTIVITY IDEAS

THE STORY	IDEAS	NOTES
1. If practical, could you start by visiting Stogumber 'This is where the Woodcutter lived'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">What might Stogumber have looked like when the woodcutter lived there?How much woodland is there nearby?	Easily seen early features include the 16th century alms houses and the medieval church (Mainly C14/15th) Harry Hill Well is reputed to have cured someone of leprosy in the C16th.
2. Crowcombe village car park 'The woodcutter passed through Crowcombe on the way to the top of the hill. He stayed at the old woman's house'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Do you think the old woman's cottage is still here?Which are the oldest buildings you can see?Look at the carved bench ends in the church, including the famous 'Dragon' carving.Collect, sketch or photograph evidence	<p>Crowcombe used to be a town.</p> <p>Easily seen medieval features are the Church House (originally almshouses to house the local poor); church and church yard crosses, built in stone, to last.</p> <p>Ordinary peoples' houses at that time were made of wood.</p> <p>Carew cottages and the old forge are at least 400 years old, though altered since.</p>
3. Drive up Crowcombe hill 'The woodman headed up the hill looking for whortleberries for the old woman, and wood for himself'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Is this the way the Woodman came?	<p>Observe the gradients and features on either side; There is an old track on right, protective tree cover.</p> <p>Wooded combes, cut deep into the hill, are a feature of the Quantocks.</p> <p>Ancient trackways cross the hill.</p> <p>Good conditions for whortleberries, traditionally gathered by Quantock people.</p>
4. Stop at Dead Woman's Ditch Car Park, on 'This was the Woodcutter's first stopping point. Local people lived in fear of the dragon who terrorised the Quantock hills, killing sheep, deer and ponies. The Woodcutter decided the trees were too small, so, still unsuspecting, he moved on.'	<p>Quantock Heath</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Are there many trees up here?Are they suitable for cutting?Collect, sketch or photograph evidenceCould a family of dragons live here? What could they eat?What would their prey live on?Do the hills support enough to sustain dragons long term?	<p>The heath is windblown and exposed.</p> <p>Few, stunted trees.</p> <p>Grazing (sheep, ponies, deer) keeps the shrub-growth down.</p> <p>The Hills support sheep, horses, deer, rabbits, some humans, etc.</p> <p>Evidence (foot prints, droppings, fur, wool, litter...) isn't hard to find.</p> <p>Look out for buzzards – the best examples of large, highly adapted, local fliers – big wing span, gliding, using the hot air thermals that rise up the side of the hill. Good eyesight can spot prey from high up.</p>

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ROUTE AND ACTIVITY IDEAS

THE STORY	IDEAS	NOTES
<p>4. Stop at Dead Woman's Ditch Car Park, on</p>	<p>Quantock Heath - continued</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Collect, sketch or photograph evidence of animal life on the hill. ● What conditions are needed for a large creature to get airborne? (height, clear view, no obstacles, hot air rising – from dragon-breath?) ● Could dragons take off or land here? ● Collect, sketch or photograph supporting evidence. (runways, cleared areas, good visibility) ● Is there any direct evidence for other dragon activity here? ● Is there enough cover for a lair? (Probably not), ● Would it be a good area for hunting? ● How would a dragon hunt? ● What sort of evidence would be left from his forays? ● Collect, sketch or photograph evidence. 	<p>You may see burnt areas from bracken clearing. Also rutted tracks and erosion from off-road vehicles.</p> <p>With imagination, children will find enough potential evidence to make a 'convincing' case for dragons: claw marks, dragon dung, scales, animal remains, dragon-eggs/shells, burnt patches, trampled ground, broken branches.....</p>
<p>5. Enter Shervage Wood, taking care crossing the main road.</p> <p>Local people believed that the dragons' lair was in Shervage Wood. They were frightened to go in. But the woodman, unaware of this, entered the woods. He found it was a good place to collect worts for the old woman, and to chop wood.</p> <p>He sat down on a 'log' for his bread, cheese and cider, and dozed off. Only then did the dragon wake!</p> <p>In fear and confusion, the woodman chopped the dragon/log in half with his axe.</p> <p>The head end of the dragon roared off to Kingston St Mary.</p> <p>The tail end of the dragon slithered to Bilbrook.</p> <p>And the woodcutter fled back to Crowcombe.</p>	<p>Consider Shervage Wood. Has it changed much since the woodcutter visited it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Find the tree with the greatest girth. (the dragon was supposed to have had a girth equal to four giant oak trees) ● Look for evidence of a dragon's lair, landing areas, tracks, larder, nest. ● Weigh up the evidence. How easy would it be to imagine a dragon here? Especially if sleepy after cider. ● Look for dragon shaped branches and natural forms ● In which directions would they all go? ● Would people believe the woodcutter's story? 	<p>Shervage is an example of ancient Quantock woodland with oak trees, (some very old and big) hazel, maple, holly, ash, willow, alder and whortleberry. Local people made a living from the woods, coppicing trees for charcoal and using oak bark in leather tanning.</p> <p>Plant clues beforehand: burned branches, ketchup 'blood' spatters, 'bloodied' sheep wool, cardboard 'dragon scales', singed and scattered feathers, antlers half-hidden, bones...</p> <p>Locate suitable logs to sit on, if possible.</p> <p>The climax could be the appearance of a dragons head, or the log 'moving' or a dragon's roar, and the children acting out its demise and chasing it away in two directions.</p>

EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1. What sort of creature was the dragon? 7 characteristics of living things. Make and use keys.	SCIENCE Classification Life Processes and Living Things	DEVELOPING ALL ASPECTS OF THINKING SKILLS ACROSS THE CURRICULUM. EMBEDDING MATHS AND ENGLISH
2. Could the Quantock Hills sustain dragons? Cover, camouflage, lair, water. Look at local maps, walk the terrain.	SCIENCE Habitat, Adaptation, Food chains Physical processes	
3. Is there enough food for dragons? Look at livestock on Quantocks. Local grazing and turvery rights.	MATHS data handling	
4. What about wild food? Talk with rangers, locals about red deer habitat and habits.	GEOGRAPHICAL SKILLS	
5. What kinds of plants support the grazing/ browsing animals? Collect samples – identify. Analyse acidity/acidity of soil.	SCIENCE Forces, Movement. DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY	
6. How could a dragon move from place to place? reptile and bird locomotion, levers, flying, wind resistance. Swimming? Model making.	SCIENCE Materials and their properties	
7. Are there any dragon relics? Decay. Fossils on the beach? In Taunton Museum?	GEOGRAPHY Unit 6. Investigating the Local Area	
8. What route could the woodman have taken from Stogumber to Crowcombe? Trace routes on 1:25,000 map. Look at old maps. Physical features.	Geographical Skills	
9. Could ancient tracks be used as routes? Trace routes between cairns, tumuli and other ancient landmarks	Unit 14 Investigating Rivers	
10. Could the streams carry away dragon's blood after slaying? Trace streams, springs, rivers: source, flow, outflow.	HISTORY Unit 18	
11. How long have there been human beings in this area, and where? Prehistoric sites on Quantocks (Iron Age hill forts, bronze age barrows). Stone age tools in Taunton museum.	What was it like to live here in the past?	
12. How did the locals make a living from the Quantocks? Charcoal burners, woodmen, shepherding, stockmen.	ART LITERACY Creative writing Traditional Stories, Myths and Legends from different cultures.	
13. What other evidence is there for dragons in this area? Local folk stories, place names, church bench ends, shields, flags.		
14. How easily could someone imagine a dragon in Shervage Wood? Textures, colours, shapes. Measure size of trees. Sketch. Collect words for sights, sounds, smells and touch.		
15. Where else could they have got the idea from? Influences on the imagination: Bible stories? dinosaur bones? pre Christian oral history.		

'GERT VORM': THE LEGEND OF THE SHERVAGE DRAGON

"'Tis well-known on Quantocks there be dragons."

The Gert Vorm of Shervage Wood brought ruin and terror to the natives of Nether Stowey and surrounding hamlets. It had decimated the sheep population and left many farmers facing ruin: they lost their stock, their wool, meat and milk supplies. Wild deer disappeared, much to the annoyance of the local hunt and gentry.

Most devastating was the loss of the Quantock ponies who were rounded up once a year in September and driven into Bridgwater for St. Matthew's Fair. The ponies provided a good source of income for the landowners, with little maintenance required except the provision of hay in really poor weather.

Two groom squires from Stowey went onto the hills to investigate the rumour of a dragon on the Quantocks. They have never been seen from that day to this.

People pondered the situation. What would happen when the sheep, deer and ponies were wiped out? Would the dragon then require human flesh? Where would it start? A reward was offered for the dragon's capture.

Then along came a woodcutter from Stogumber. He was a simple earthbound character. He decided to travel to Crowcombe and from there to journey to the Quantocks to cut some wood. The stranger arrived at the house of an old woman in Crowcombe. He asked if he could rent a room for a few days.

"T'be sure me dear. Where be from?"

"Stogumber."

"Ah. You are a stranger in these parts, no doubt."

The old woman gave him a room, and then packed him a lunch as the woodman was keen to start cutting wood.

"Here be yur nummach me dear, bread'n'cheese, fruit an zider."

"Well arr."

"Could ee do me a small favour – get I some worts?"

The old woman made use of the free supply of wortleberries which grew on the Quantocks. She made and sold wortleberry tarts to supplement her meagre income, but the climb to the top was steep and she made use of others whenever she could.

The woodcutter made his way up Crowcombe Hill, carrying his food in a withy basket which he would use for the worts he gathered. He stopped at Dead Woman's Ditch to look at the trees but they were too small, so he journeyed on to Shervage Wood.

After chopping a couple of small trees down and cutting them into manageable pieces he decided to have his nummach, so he sat against a large trunk and began to eat the bread and cheese. This he washed down with the cider. Sitting astride the trunk, the woodman grew drowsy.

Then the trunk began to 'squirm' about under um'.

"Yer now, wass goin' on? Squirm' about would ee?"

The woodman reacted in the only way he knew. He raised his axe and brought it down on the trunk and a tremendous roar echoed through the woods. The dragon had been severed, fore from aft. Its head roared off to Kingston St Mary, whilst its tail slithered off to Bilbrook.

The woodman made his way slowly back to Crowcombe and to the old woman. He told her about his encounter with the dragon.

"Didn' ee know?", she asked, "But then you'm from Stogumber an' they'm all a bit thick there."

Traditional tale. This version ©Judy Fursland, 2004.

THE WOODCUTTER BY JUDITH FURLAND © 2004

Rooks were raging where great elms were felled
and oaks with limbs as thick as dinosaurs
and ash, spire-tall all laying on the earth
in Shervage Wood, so secret, dark and deep.

There came a man – unknowing as he was –
from Crowcombe Combe, to gather up the wood.
His axe well honed, his body taut and flexed,
his belly flat from hunger-fires within.

He took the path past Robin Upright's Hill,
Where trees were wizened, stunted, gnarled and bent.
He saw no deer, nor sheep, nor russet mares,
the place a silent, eerie, haunted wood.

To Shervage Wood, so secret dark and deep,
he swung his axe, and stacking as he went
tied branches up, bundles to shoulder home,
then sat to quench his thirst and feed his fires.

He leaned against the fallen trunk, so rough
his calloused hands felt baby soft and smooth.
He fingered bread and cheese, held liquid gold
squeezed gently from the orchards' heady fruit.

His eyes were heavy in the midday sun,
his head a-throbbing with the golden wine.
He dreamed he was uplifted to the sky
by this great trunk which lurched and lunged awry.

This monstrous tree was living breathing flesh,
lying here replete, to warm its blood.
Sheepful, deerful, mareful, its fires quenched,
and roused from sleep by this soft-headed sop.

"Yer, now, wass goin' on?" The man leaped down and
picking up his axe, "Squirmy about would 'ee!"
The blade came down and down and down again
till the gurt vorm was cleanly cut in half.

Its roar filled all the Quantocks with its pain
that birds and startled chicks fled from their nests.
The earth was stained a bloody, carmine red
and streams and rivers flowed with dragon's blood.

Its wondrous scaly tail – oak green and grey –
did slither off to Bilbrook near the coast.
The fiery dragon head with bulging eyes
and silvered mane, walked east and disappeared.

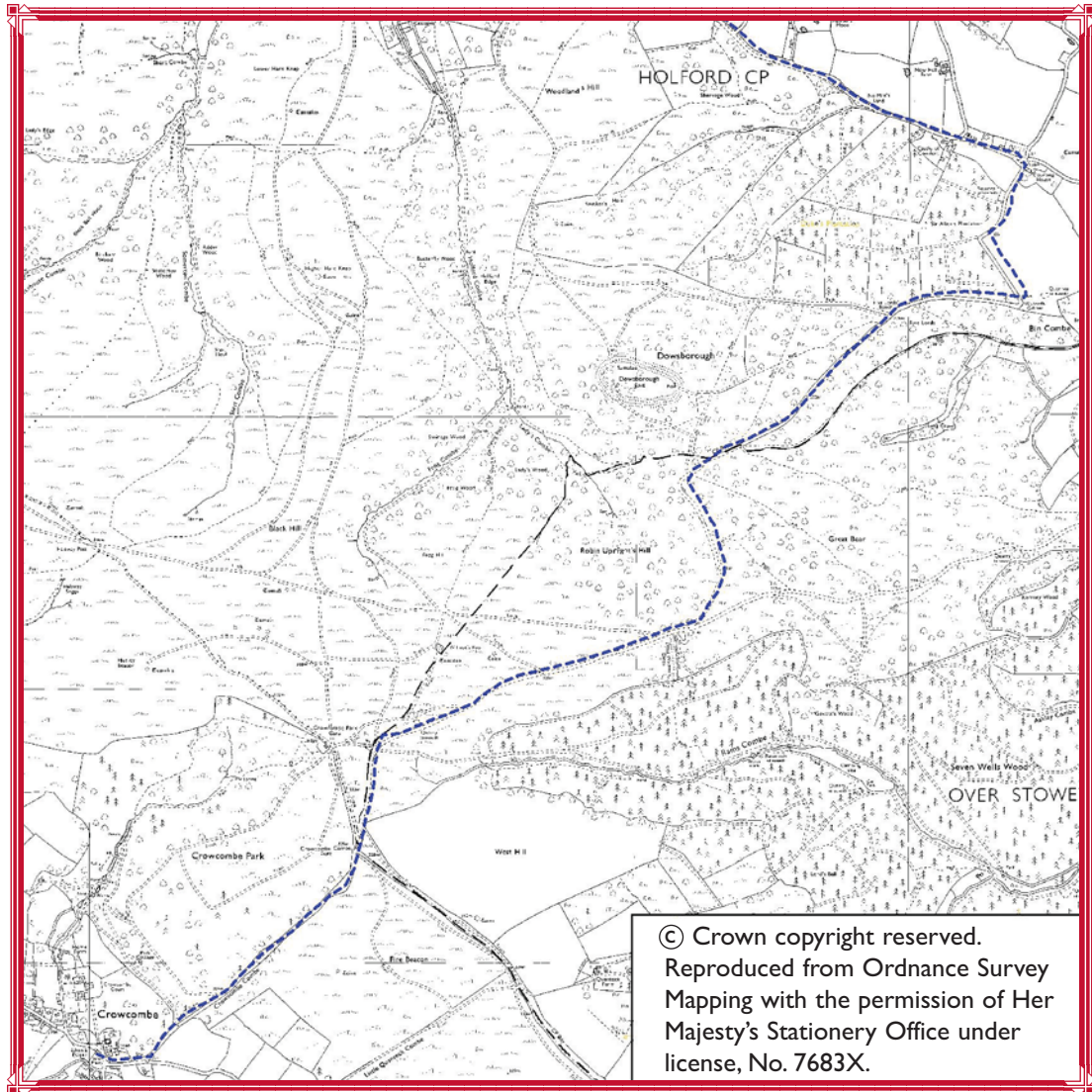
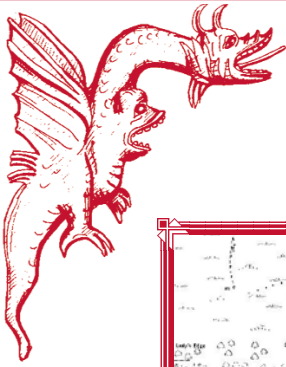
The woodman now no longer gathers wood,
his fame a sure insurance against cold.
His belly full, his muscles slack, unused,
the tale he tells each night to cider fans.

Now Quantock Hills are full of grazing sheep,
and old red deer and russet mares and foals.
No dragon licks the livestock from the fields,
nor roars to frighten maidens in their beds.

But Quantock soil is still deep dragon-red
and rooks are raging when great trees are felled.



CROWCOMBE TO



OS map 1932 6inch:1 mile. Crowcombe to Shervage Wood



SITE VISIT TO SHERVAGE WOOD



16TH CENTURY CARVED BENCH END FROM NORTON FITZWARREN
CHURCH SHOWING MEN RUNNING AWAY FROM A DRAGON.



16TH CENTURY CARVED BENCH END FROM NORTON FITZWARREN
CHURCH SHOWING MEN RUNNING AWAY FROM A DRAGON.

QUANTOCK DRAGON QUEST

Name:

- I have listened to the legend of the Shervage Dragon.
- I think the story:

has no basis in fact

is completely true

0 -----10



This is my question

This is what I plan to do to answer my question

This is what I discovered

The answer to my question is...

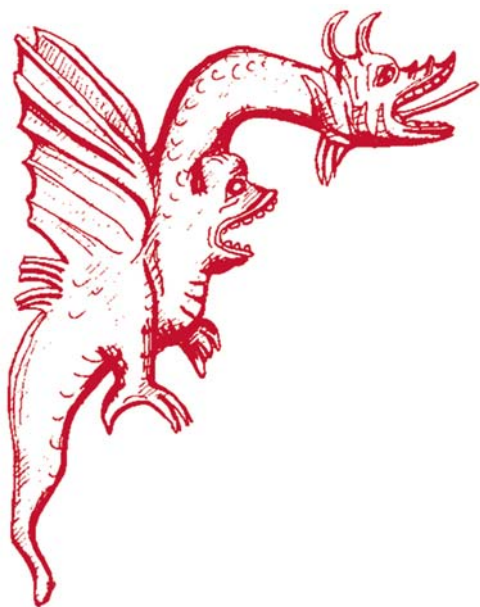


- I now think the story....

has no basis in fact

is completely true

0 -----10



Name: _____



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