

**OKEHAMPTON AND UP TO THE LOW MOORS AROUND THE MILITARY
CAMP
START POINT GRID REF: 591 951**

On Wednesday May 17 2000 we ventured up to the North Moors and Okehampton. George Parkhouse, who led the walk, had produced a small map of Okehampton to help us get to the right car park. Owing to a road diversion just before the entry to Okehampton, all sorts of confusion followed and we ended up at a car park up by Okehampton Station whilst another managed to go to Okehampton via Two Bridges. A most strange route to take!!!

Eventually all 13 of us did manage to get to the right car park at Okehampton and we were off, only half an hour after the scheduled departure time.



An outline of the route we took will be shown above for reference. To follow the route in detail you are strongly advised to relate this route to your 1:25000 ordnance survey map of Dartmoor, outdoor leisure 28 map is a good one to use. It is also hoped that the description below may also be of some help in guiding walkers around the route.



When we all finally congregated in the car park, we were briefed by George who advised us that it was more moderate than the walks list had indicated and that it would be between 8 and 9 miles duration.

We set off leaving the car park up some steps through houses turned right and headed across by Okehampton School.

With the school to our left we crossed a level grassy area before crossing a stream and taking a narrow steep zig zag path up through a wood. Unless you knew the track was there you would almost certainly not notice the start of the track up.

We were climbing quite steeply for a while.



After 10 minutes of climbing we emerged on a narrow road with several houses along it.

This narrow road took us to a main road and to the car park we had inadvertently parked in by at Okehampton Railway Station.



If we had continued to drive up the hill we would have ended up at Okehampton camp and beyond that, onto the Okehampton range where the Red flags indicating live firing would almost certainly be there to limit our access further.

Our initial foray in the car was rather like the Grand Old Duke of York we had driven up to the top of the hill only to drive down again.

We then walk backed up to where we had parked previously, good for the lungs I understand.

Having arrived at the station area, we didn't continue on up towards the camp but turned right onto a footpath come bridleway which was on a bearing of 250 degrees and 200 metres below but parallel to the Okehampton by pass dual carriageway.



The path skirted a field full of bluebells. Everyone has remarked how 2000 has been one of the best years for bluebells for many many years. They really are prolific and turning whole areas blue in colour.



We descended for a while and then over a stile and walked up the path heading towards Okehampton Golf course.

The Bridlepath was very clearly signed with dire warnings about watching for golf balls. Since the path went right through the centre of the golf course, the signs were very much needed.

Eventually we left the golf course and continued on to cross the main dual carriageway leading into Cornwall.

After crossing the main A30 trunk road, we entered a wood and walked up through it, heading south for just under a half mile until we passed under a massive structure of iron girders and supports which constitutes the Meldon Viaduct.



This is now a cycle track but was once part of the rail route linking Okehampton to points west and to the east heading to Exeter and up to London.

A few hundred yards further on, we stopped for our morning coffee and some distance ahead of us we could see the huge dam at the end of Meldon Reservoir. Unfortunately we were just too far away to get a decent picture of the dam.



After the break we swung east and started our only long ascent of the day as we made our way up towards the moorland high above us.

We passed huge old quarry workings where a massive section of the hillside had been literally removed after the granite rock.

As the picture shows, the hillside shape has been changed for ever, but no doubt the granite excavated was put to good use.

Continuing the climb up the hill, we followed the route of the Red-A-Ven brook as it tumbled its way down through the valley.



We soon left the brook and headed south east and then east as we continued the climb up towards a local high point at about 430 metres on the edge of Black Down.



For at least a mile we walked close to a dry stone wall. I missed yet another photo opportunity as two of us, slightly ahead of the rest, passed a sheep beside the wall which didn't rush away. It simply remained where it was, watching us pass within a few feet of it.

The rest of the group, following behind, noticed that the sheep was trapped by wire and couldn't get away.

Apparently three of the group then held the sheep whilst John Skinner cut the wire and whatever was trapping it.

Apparently unharmed by its ordeal, the sheep shot off without even a thank you when it was finally released!!!!

Ahead of us and to the north, we could see Okehampton camp. Little did I realise that the army would permit us to walk straight through the middle of it.

We climbed over Anthony Stile and took the path which took us directly into the camp itself.



There is a public right of way through the camp and we were exercising our rights.

However I expect the army would have soon let us know we were not welcome, if they had wished and therefore 'exercising our rights' is a little ambitious in the circumstances.



As we entered the camp, we saw a cross at the high point and wondered why it was there.

Luckily the plaque on the cross gave the answer. Young (sic) Eric can be seen memorising the information on the plaque to advise me of any errors I may make in this description.

It was a memorial cross from 1971, commemorating the start of the now very well known Ten Tors event, so

popular today.

Apparently the Junior Leaders Infantry Battalion organised the first event from their base at Newton Abbot before relocating to Okehampton Camp.

As we walked through the camp we could see evidence of the equipment used for the Millenium Ten Tors event which had taken place the previous weekend.

We wandered through the camp, heading for the exit on the other side. The exit is shown on the map as Gunnery Lodge. The military humour again cuts in and as you may be able to read on the photograph the lodge is affectionately known as the Wendy House.



Leaving the camp, we walked north east across relatively level ground and then started our descent down the hill.

Way below us we could see Okehampton spread out in the plain below.



After a short distance down the road, I noticed a small cross and what looked like a covered over area. The map shows that it was Fitz Well or Sitz Well, not sure from map.

The road ahead dropped steeply away and we followed it down north east for a few hundred yards to an area called Klondyke, where it turned through 90 degrees to the west. Try as I could I couldn't find Lil.

We crossed the road and took the footpath still heading north east. We found a spot just by a hedge and tried to keep out of the strong cold west wind for our lunch.

Even down off the moors it was cold and we were soon on our way again. We headed east across access land



following the contours for about a half a mile and below us to our right and ahead of us we could see steep valleys.

We soon found the track downhill and had a very steep descent down to the valley floor and to the river which runs through it.

The East Okement River naturally lends part of its name to Okehampton downstream of us.



We passed under the viaduct carrying the main A30 and then a few yards further on we crossed the East Okement river, over a small footbridge and turned left to pass under the old rail bridge.

A few yards further along, we took a footpath to our left which indicated we were heading towards Ball Hill. Since we were in woodland, we couldn't see the hill up through the trees and followed track along by

the river for a quarter of a mile before swinging north west and away from the river. The path was clearly marked and eventually we could see the outskirts of Okehampton ahead of us. To our left there were sports fields and floodlit tennis courts; yes we were back near the town once again.

Leaving the Ball Hill track, we emerged on metalled roads again for the final section back to the car park.

On our left we passed an old mill with it's water wheel, which apparently is still turned by the water duct system which is divertable to power the wheel when required.



A few yards up the road, we turned left through the houses we had left four hours before and made our way down the steps to the car park again.

This car park is certainly well tucked away and unless you knew it was there you could walk or drive straight by it without even noticing it.

Although the walk was a little shorter than the distance advertised, it had been a walk over completely new territory to me and had plenty of features to interest the group.

It could easily be extended, live firing permitting, to take us up to the high moors and even to Yes Tor at over 600 metres. Until the military cut back on their live firing, these tracts will only be available to walkers at weekends and at other times as permitted by the military.

After thanks to George Parkhouse for showing us this area, new to many of us, we were soon back in our cars for the one hour drive back to Plymouth.