

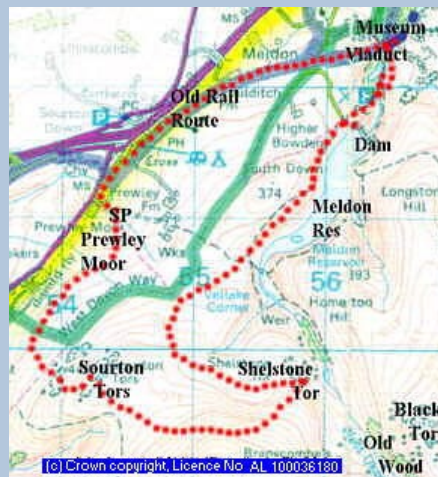
NORTH DARTMOOR TORS AND MELDON RESERVOIR START POINT: 545 912

Unusually for a Sunday, we had a trip up to the Okehampton area for a walk from Prewley Moors Car Park along the disused, but nicely converted rail line to the Meldon Viaduct and then via Meldon Reservoir up to the moors to the south of the Reservoir.

The walk took place on the 4th June and the leader was Helen Rowett, a very experienced leader with many decades of knowledge of Dartmoor behind her. Remarkably, it was only a few months ago that she had broken her ankle and to be leading a walk of approaching 9 miles so soon after the injury shows her brilliant powers of recovery and of course her astonishing dedication to be back walking on her beloved Dartmoor again.

God smiles on the favoured and we had the best weather conditions for many weeks, with summer sunshine to start, little wind and temperatures just right for walking.

The first goal was to find the start point off the Tavistock to Okehampton Road just before the A30 dual carriageway section. There is no obvious signpost to Prewley Treatment Works, however it is a turning right about a mile past the village of Sourton, as far as I could see it was the first turning right that we found after the village. Having turned right, the car park is only a couple of hundred yards up the narrow road.



The route we took is shown on the map above and indicates a good circular route taking us up to about 1800 ft by Branscombe Loaf. The route is illustrative only and to get a better appreciation it should be read in conjunction with an up to date 1:25000 ordnance survey map of the area, the Dartmoor Leisure map no 25 is ideal.

By 10.30 we had 23 ramblers who had made the journey and after a short introduction to the walk from Helen we were off, making our way down to near the main road before turning right onto the newly tarmaced over cycle route that once was the rail line.



The walking/cycle route has obviously had a lot of money put into it since the track is very very smooth, wide and makes easy walking and cycling.

I believe the intention is for the track to extend right along to Okehampton Railway Station.

When Helen planned the walk, she intended to follow it through to its planned destination, however since a section of the track was not open on the day, she had planned an alternative route which we followed.

Indicating a well funded project, there were several ornate signposts which we passed on our walk along the line.

No ordinary finger posts these, but wrought iron pieces with cleverly designed forgings on them, certainly things of beauty to be admired, as well as used.

I understand that these were erected and paid for by the Royal Bank of Scotland, very, very ornate and a credit to the bank, if you excuse the pun.

They contain a lot of information as well as the decorative effects which they give. I've never seen direction posts quite like these any where else I've been and they are very new, indicating just how recently the line had been turned into a walking/cycling track.



We continued on this track for approaching a mile as it continued along towards Okehampton. We saw a valley opening before us and over it a magnificent railway viaduct.

Whereas the majority of viaducts are of stone, this one was constructed wholly from iron girders forming a lattice work of iron.

How long has it been there? It must have been at least a hundred years, perhaps I would have found out had I visited the museum on the far side of the viaduct.

We crossed over the wide bridge and on the far side was an old train engine and a coach, lovingly restored by enthusiasts as well as the small museum come information centre.

This was as far as we went on this line and after lunch we took the zig zag winding path on the right hand side below the viaduct and followed it down as it descended steeply to the valley below to a road which led up to the viaduct and the museum.



The road was surprisingly busy with buses and cars. After a few yards of walking up the road we took a footpath off to our right which led down to beside a river flowing down from the moors above.

It was the West Okement River running down from the moors and feeding the big reservoir above us, Meldon Reservoir.



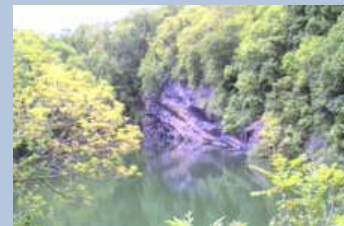
From our vantage point we could see the huge dam in the distance up the valley and we knew that we would be heading up to this dam a little later.

We continued to walk up along side the river with the moors high above us to our left and ahead of us. The views were magnificent. We could see plenty of evidence of old mine workings and excavations for the local granite.

We came upon a wooden footbridge over the West Okement river and crossed it to the far side.

Helen suggested that we take a slight diversion here since just below us was an old flooded granite excavation area which had its own beauty.

We walked downstream for a very short while and there on our left was a magnificent pool, apparently very deep.



We admired this spectacle for a few minutes before returning to the bridge and starting to make our way up the footpath to the dam.



After a three hundred yard steepish uphill section we emerged onto a road which ran from the village of Meldon to the dam of Meldon reservoir.

There is a road across the top of the dam and from the far side there is a footpath down to the base of the dam a long way below.

There was plenty of water running down the overspill, not surprising, considering the rainfall we had experienced during the month of May, three times the expected amount I have read.

We stopped by the dam for lunch and to admire the superb views up to the moors. Across the dam we could see Longstone Hill rising high above us and looking south we could make out Black Tor about mile and a half away.

Meldon reservoir is long and narrow about three quarters of a mile long and only a couple of hundred yards wide at its widest point. It was deep though as the picture of the dam clearly illustrates.



For those who walk this route, it is worth noting that just up the road from the dam there is a small car park with a toilet tucked away in it.

After a pleasant, unhurried lunch, we retraced our steps up the road for a short distance and then turned southwest onto a footpath that headed to the moors above.

A steady climb followed to the right of South Downs and up towards the Tors and high land above us. We climbed for about a mile, generally southwest, and as we did so the magnificent panorama of the majestic north Dartmoor moors unfolded ahead of us.

We could see Sourton Tors ahead of us and due east, about 2 miles away, we could see High Willhays and Yes Tor towering above us. High Willhays is the highest point on Dartmoor at just over 625 metres, well over 2000 ft in height.



The huge hills and the sweeping valleys here are awesome and we were lucky to have excellent visibility for the walk.

Our route now took us south east towards Shelstone Tor.

Had we gone in a straight line, we would have descended into a valley only to have to climb again up the other side. We followed the contours around swinging in an arc towards Branscombe's Loaf and Corr Ridge above and then following the arc around to Shelstone Tor for our afternoon break.

The views were once again magnificent, looking up to the highest Tors on Dartmoor to our east, towards the reservoir and north Devon to our north and up a magnificent valley to our south east.

On the other side of the valley, less than a half a mile from us was Black Tor and below it, just above the West Okement river the very old wooded area, now a nature reserve, called Black-a-Tor copse.

Large areas of Dartmoor have been replanted with conifers by the forestry commission. This copse was original and must have been what large areas of Dartmoor forest were like, many hundreds of years ago. It is now protected as a nature reserve and must be the home for a wide diversity of Dartmoor animals and birds.



The half a mile long area of woodland can just be seen in the different tinge of green in picture on the right, together with Black Tor just above it.



After the break, we headed steeply up for a couple of hundred feet towards Branscombe's Loaf before picking up a track which took us north west towards Sourton Tors, just under a mile away.

Once we had reached the path, the walking was easy as we followed the contours across to the Tors.

Some of us walk around the Tors and there below us about a mile to the north we could see the car park just beyond Prewley Moor.

Once again good views and below us to the west we could see the village of Sourton and some miles beyond, looking west, we could just make out the relatively new Radford Reservoir.



To get down to Prewley Moor we had a steep descent, short enough but very steep and it is not often that people zig zag going downhill but quite a few of us did this time.

Having reached the level ground we had a relatively easy final mile back north across Prewley Moor and to the car park. Helen warned us not to head directly to the car park but to swing right to take the slightly higher and drier ground for the final half mile to the car park.

Overall, the weather had been very kind to us, there had been a little rain for the final hour or so, but very light and many didn't even bother to put on wet weather gear.

It had been a most interesting and varied walk and fully 8 miles at least, covered in about four and a half hours including stops.

Helen had done it, so soon after her accident she was out leading again and leading with vigour and enthusiasm which belies her four score years and four.

Congratulations Helen and we all admire the way you have recovered so quickly.