

NOTES

Yelverton to Princetown Railway

The line of the old railway now forms part of a spectacular but not-too-difficult cycleway between Burrator and Princetown.

Granite was taken to Plymouth in horse-drawn wagons along a mineral railway built in 1862. The mineral railway was replaced by the Great Western railway line in 1883 which itself was closed in 1956.

Swelltor Quarry

This is one of the three main granite quarries in the immediate locality, all now disused. Alongside and slightly above the main line you will see huge pieces of dressed granite. These were corbels intended to support the walkway on London Bridge. They were surplus to requirements and never left the quarry. However, when the bridge was moved to the USA, replacement components were taken from here.

Vixen Tor

Although not so high above sea-level, Vixen Tor is one of the tallest tors on Dartmoor. Unfortunately, its recent purchaser has declared it out-of-bounds to the public. So, for the time-being, admire it from afar.

Direction Stone

"T" for Tavistock and "A" for Ashburton. You are on part of an ancient transmoor route between Ashburton and Tavistock.

Stone Rows

There are probably as many theories as to the purpose of these 2000 –3000 year-old features as there are stone rows on Dartmoor. Most are of the opinion that they were ceremonial objects. There are single, double and triple alignments varying in length from a few yards to more than a mile. These are usually associated with tall standing stones (menhirs) at one end.

Kistvaen

These are generally found as 4 slabs on end to form a box. Occasionally the large slab forming the lid is still nearby. Originally the structure would have been covered with a large mound of earth and stones.

WILDLIFE

Damselflies

Seen from June to August, they flutter rather than dart like the larger Dragonflies. In flight their slender bodies glint like metal.



Damselfly

Dwarf Oaks

Grazing animals could not get at the seedlings growing from the crevices between the rocks of Hucken Tor. The prevailing winds stunted the young trees' growth and, over the years, these dwarfed oaks became the area's natural form of oak.

Whortleberries

Or Bilberries or lots of other local names carry greenish pink flowers in late spring followed by delicious purple fruit in early autumn.

Birds

As you climb towards the railway watch for **Stonechat** on the gorse bushes. Circling high above you by Swelltor Quarry you may see **Buzzards** and also hear the distinctive "cronk" of a **Raven**.

As you follow the stone row look and listen for **Skylark**, **Meadow Pipit**, and **Linnet**.

The wooded area around Hucken Tor is ideal habitat for **Jay**, **Treecreeper**, **Nuthatch**, **Blue Tit**, **Great Tit** and **Coal Tit**.



Stonechat



Raven



Walk No.8

EGGWORTHY / WITHILL – KING'S TOR – MERRIVALE CIRCULAR



Hucken Tor

Distance 5 miles (8 km)

Time 3 hours

Description Initially, the walk follows a country lane, farm track and winding footpath. You then reach the disused Yelverton to Princetown branch railway. The views from the gently ascending railway track of the valley below and the moorland beyond are exquisite. The next section across the open moor is criss-crossed with Bronze Age stone rows headed with a spectacular standing-stone. The return leg of the walk is along an old enclosed green lane and quiet country road.

Difficulties? Parts of the enclosed lane from Merrivale to Davey town can become quite muddy. After heavy rain, you will need to choose your crossing point over the stream with care after leaving the railway.

Toilets, refreshments Providing you get there during opening times, the Dartmoor Inn will provide the usual pub facilities.



Start point Start the walk at whatever point on the route is convenient for you. To avoid complicating the walk directions it is assumed that the starting point is the parking area on the open moor immediately after the cattle grid at the end of the metalled road leading from the crossroads between Withill and Eggworthy to Criptor Farm.

Walk Directions Walk along the track towards Criptor Farm. After entering the enclosed land, leave the track before a stream along the signposted footpath on your right. Follow the blue waymarks as the path crosses the stream and meanders through gorse and boulders, climbing steadily towards the railway track. Go through a gate onto the railway track and turn left. The line of the old **Yelverton to Princetown branch** now forms part of the Burrator to Princetown cycleway. On your right is **Swelltor Quarry**.

Continue along the railway as it heads north above the Walkham valley. From this section of the walk you will have a particularly good view of **Vixen Tor** across the river. The track now bears right through a cutting as it contours round the top of King's Tor. Two hundred yards or so after emerging from the cutting leave the railway and go diagonally downhill towards the wall below you. Follow the wall as it turns left down to the stream at the bottom of the valley.

Cross the stream wherever you can near the wall and go straight up the opposite bank towards a vertical stone 200 yards in front of you. This is a **direction stone**, marked "A" on one side and "T" on the other.

Now bear left and walk along two parallel double rows of Bronze Age **stone rows**. After about 100 yards you will see an excellent example of a **kistvaen** (Bronze Age burial chamber). Now cross over the leat (water channel) to your right and go diagonally right downhill towards the road.

Walk down the road towards the Dartmoor Inn and the bridge crossing the River Walkham. Before the bridge turn left, by Hillside, along the farm track which after 10 minutes or so takes you through Longash Farm. Please close all gates after you.

Continue along the track as it crosses a small

bridge across a stream. Watch out for a scintillating display of **damselflies** here during the summer. This ancient track then climbs slightly through the trees before reaching a gate alongside huge boulders. This is Hucken Tor whose granite mass, described by William Crossing (1909) as "so delightfully shrouded in **dwarf oaks** and mountain ash, tufts of heather, and patches of the bright green **whortleberry plants**, that they present an appearance that cannot fail to enchant the beholder".

Through the gate the track descends giving beautiful views of the Walkham valley to your right. After going through a series of three gates you arrive at Davey town and the metalled road which will take you back to the crossroads where you turn left towards Criptor and your transport.