

## Walk No. 52 Two Museums Walk

This walk links two museums on the northern edge of Dartmoor. It starts at the Finch Foundry Museum in Sticklepath, a working museum owned and operated by the National Trust, and ends at Okehampton's Museum of Dartmoor Life. On the way it follows the River Taw through the picturesque Belstone Cleave.

For much of its route the walk follows the line of the Tarka Trail. This long-distance path follows the route followed by Tarka the Otter in the book of that name, a long figure of eight walk through the northern part of Devon centred on Barnstaple. The Two Museums Walk follows the southern extremity of the Tarka Trail, giving a good sample of what may be found along the Trail.

The Two Museums Walk is designed as a one-way route, using the local bus service to travel from Okehampton to Sticklepath then walking back. It is also possible to extend the walk beyond the museum at Okehampton to the railway station, where there is transport, parking, information and refreshments.

### Fact File

Okehampton is served by bus routes to and from Exeter, Plymouth, Torrington, Bideford and Barnstaple. On summer Sundays it is also served by Dartmoor Line trains from Exeter.

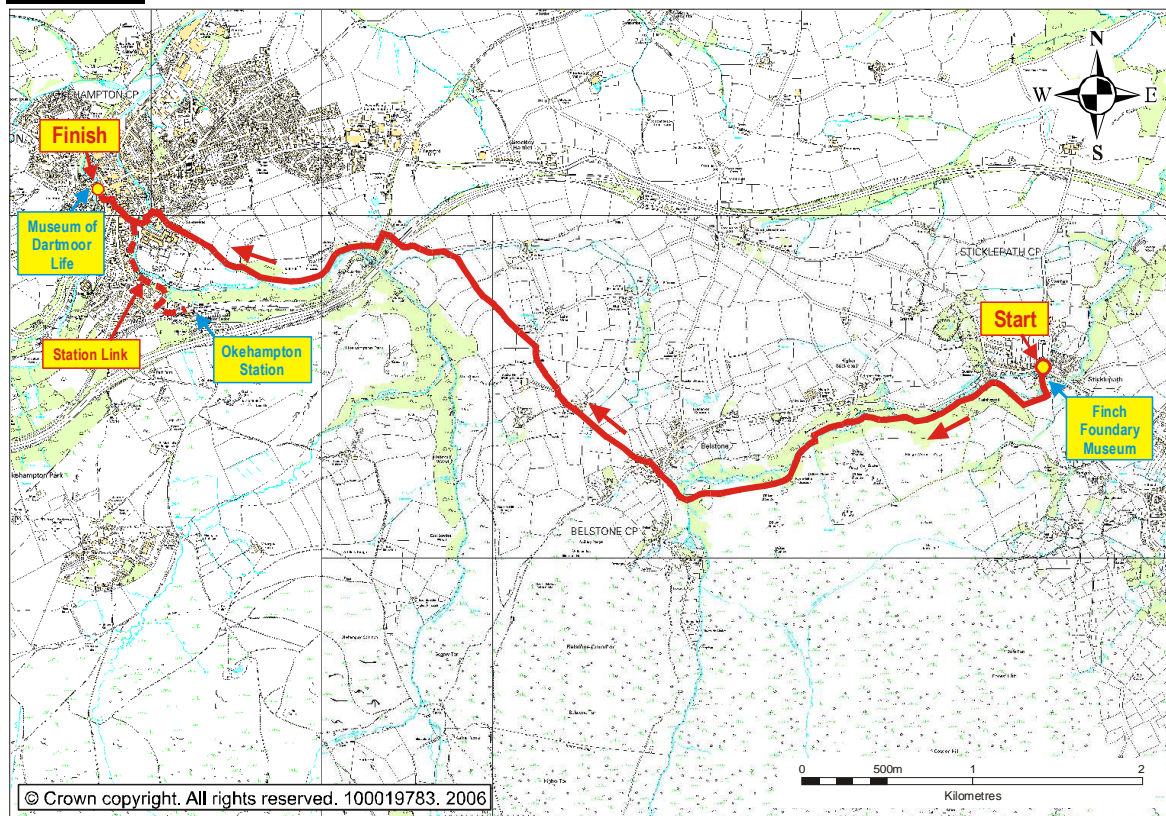
Buses from Okehampton to Sticklepath go from West Street throughout the week and from Okehampton Station on Sundays. For timetable details contact Traveline on 0870 608 2 608 or visit [www.traveline.org.uk](http://www.traveline.org.uk).

Train times may be obtained on 08457 484950 or visit [www.thetrainline.com](http://www.thetrainline.com).

Walk Length: 8km/5 miles; 3 stiles; no steep climbs except for a steady climb of approximately 60m/200 feet on the extension from Okehampton's museum to the station.

Facilities: Sticklepath has a pub and shop; Belstone has a pub; Okehampton has all facilities.

## The Walk



**If arriving at Sticklepath by bus from Okehampton, cross the road to the Finch Foundry Museum.**

Sticklepath is a pleasant little village on the old main road between London and Cornwall. It derives its name from the steep, or “stickle” climb on the old road at the west end of the village.

The Finch Foundry Museum, owned and operated by the National Trust, is a former corn and cloth mill which became an edge-tool factory in 1814. It was owned by the Finch Brothers until 1960 and made a range of agricultural hand tools including billhooks, scythes and shovels. Three waterwheels drove tilt-hammers, drop-forge hammers, cutting shears, fans for the forges, a grindstone and a polishing wheel. Production finally ceased in 1966, but the National Trust have retained the machinery in operation, still powered by water, and it is well worth taking the time to look round.

**Go to the bottom of the Foundry car parks, past the Quaker Burial Ground, and go through a gate at the far end on the left. Follow the path through the trees.**

Several Sticklepath Quakers sailed with William Penn to America to help found his Quaker colony of Pennsylvania.

There is a fingerpost here indicating the start of the Two Museums Walk by the grassy area known locally as Billy Green.

**Continue on the path to a footbridge over the river. Cross this bridge and turn right. After passing through a gate the path forks. Bear right at the fork and follow the path which soon arrives alongside the river again.**

A little way along on the opposite bank is Cleave Mill. Now renovated as housing, some of the gear used to divert water from the river for power is still obvious. The mill was owned by the Pearse family in the 19th century, this being the family of Tom Pearse of Widecombe Fair fame. The grey mare of the song is said to have been stabled in Sticklepath.

**Follow this attractive riverside path through Skaigh Woods. After a while it leads to a footbridge over the river. Cross this bridge.**

Notice the quotation from Tarka the Otter included in the bridge. Tarka followed this river on his way down from High Dartmoor to the north Devon coast. This river is the Taw, which rises in the great wilderness of north Dartmoor at Cranmere Pool, ultimately to arrive at the north coast beyond Barnstaple.

**Continue on the path ahead through the trees with the Taw now on the left. Very soon the path bears slightly right to arrive at another, broader path. Turn left here. Ignore a couple of minor paths going towards the river then, at the next major junction, turn left to another footbridge. Cross the Taw again, and on the far side turn right, alongside the river.**

It will have been obvious for some time that the Taw has cut quite a deep valley in the edge of Dartmoor here. The valley now becomes even more pronounced as the path enters Belstone Cleave. The Cleave features as a location in Tarka the Otter, where Tarka fought, and defeated, the stoat Swagdagger. The book describes the Cleave in words that are still appropriate now, almost eighty years later. The swiftly flowing river, clear brown water and tumbling rapids make Belstone Cleave both picturesque and atmospheric.

**The path now becomes a little rougher in places as it continues alongside, or very close to, the Taw, which is here descending at some speed. Continue to keep to the obvious path as it climbs away from the river.**

As the path rises a better idea of the wooded slopes of the Cleave may be obtained, and soon buildings on the edge of the village at Belstone appear ahead. Nearby, but largely invisible from here, are the remains of Ivy Tor Mine, a tin mine of medieval origin, but also worked in the 1800s.

**After meeting another path coming from the left, the route descends ahead to a ford and footbridge crossing the Taw. Pass over the bridge and go ahead and then left uphill on a clear track. At the top is the green at the village of Belstone.**

Looking back from the river there is a good view of Belstone Cleave and, beyond, the slopes of Dartmoor rising to the high point of Cosdon Hill.

**Walk over the green to Belstone, passing the side of the Tors Inn, to the junction by the telephone box.**

The building opposite was until fairly recently Belstone's Post Office. Before that, as the sign says, it was the Telegraph Office but its 19th century origins were as a Zion Wesleyan Chapel.

**Turn left at the junction, then fork right.**

The Two Museums Walk departs from the Tarka Trail here for a while. That route takes a long loop onto the edge of the high moor on its way to Okehampton, while the Two Museums Walk takes a more direct route.

**Follow this quiet road for approximately 1km/0.5 mile to reach a cattle grid.**

From this relatively high point, there are good views ahead over the lower land of central Devon. On the far horizon, on a clear day, can be seen the outline of Exmoor.

**Immediately after crossing the cattle grid cross the stile on the left into the field and cross the field diagonally to a gate. Go through and follow the fence on the right downhill. Cross the stile in the bottom corner of this field and continue downhill, hedge now on the left. Cross the slightly tricky stile in the bottom corner of this field and continue ahead. At the bottom of the next field the path leads to a clapper bridge over a stream. Cross this and continue to the gate onto a lane.**

**Go through the gate and turn left along the lane. Pass under the A30 Okehampton by-pass and then a railway bridge to arrive at a junction. Turn left here then fork left down a narrow lane.**

This is Fatherford. Its name derives from a Saxon word for cattle ford, but it is now dominated by the two viaducts. The older stone structure carried the former Southern Railway main line between London and Plymouth and now carries the Dartmoor Railway Line to Okehampton, while the newer concrete one carries the A30 Okehampton by-pass.

**A little way along the lane, before the viaducts, is a gate on the right. Go through here, following the signpost to Okehampton via Ball Hill.**

The walk has now rejoined the line of the Tarka Trail, which comes in from the opposite direction and then follows this same path.

**Follow the path through the woodland and alongside the river.**

This river is the East Okement. Flowing off Dartmoor, it eventually joins the River Torridge and on to the sea at the same estuary on the North Devon coast as that used by the Taw which was followed earlier.

The area through which the path now passes is owned and maintained by a local trust as an area for conservation and quiet enjoyment.

**After passing through a gate the path arrives at a junction. Go ahead and slightly left, through an old iron kissing gate, onto a gravel path.**

The watercourse on the left here is no longer the East Okement river but an old mill leat, taking water from the river for use at Okehampton Town Mill ahead.

**After passing through another gate the path arrives at Okehampton college. The leat is crossed here. Continue along the lane ahead. At the residential area go ahead and pass Town Mill on the left. Turn left down the steps next to and immediately after the mill.**

Okehampton's Town Mill was mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086. It has a turning water wheel, dating from 1882. There is a small information board at the foot of the steps.

**At the bottom of the steps turn right and cross the road, then take the path immediately on the left.**

Next to the path is the Old Mill, with its prominent chimney, not to be confused with Town Mill earlier. In the 17th century there was a wheat and rye mill here, side by side. The mills were enlarged in the 1800s and a fertiliser business set up, with a bone crushing plant and production of sulphuric acid, which was pumped uphill to the railway station. This was abandoned when the pipe broke. The chimney dates to the mid 1800s when the site was used as a manure and vitriol works.

**Go left at the bottom of the path, walking along the back of the Old Mill, then turn left again to a road. Turn right here and keep ahead past Station Road and Castle Road, then bear left at Jacobs Pool. Turn right through the little car park and the Museum courtyard is at the far end, with Okehampton's Museum of Dartmoor Life, the second of the walk's Two Museums.**

The museum is well worth visiting for its displays of local life and history. For those who wish to return to Okehampton Station, or to extend the walk to finish there, there is a pleasant walk through Okehampton's Park.

**Retrace your steps out of Jacobs Pool past Castle Road and Station Road to the entrance to Simmons Park on the right. Follow the path ahead past the obelisk and alongside the river (the East Okement again), passing the Swiss chalet. Keep going until the path reaches a rustic footbridge over the river, where it doubles back right and climbs a series**

of steps away from the river. At the first junction up the steps go left, up more steps and on ahead at another junction eventually to arrive at a road. Turn left and the station is straight ahead.

### Further Information

For information on the Tarka Trail there is a free introductory leaflet available as well as a detailed information pack. The pack costs £2.00 in local Tourist Information Centres. Both the leaflet and the pack may also be obtained from the Discover Devon Information Service, Westcott Road, Barnstaple, EX32 8AW, telephone 0870 608 5531. For the free leaflet quote reference DP101; the pack costs £3.50 including post and packaging; quote reference DP102 and make any cheques payable to Devon County Council.

Local Tourist Information Centres also have a range of information available about other walks in the Okehampton area.

For information on the wider networks of walking routes throughout Devon, obtain the free brochure "Discover Devon - Walking" from local information outlets or from the address above, quoting reference DP04. Alternatively, visit [www.discoverdevon.com](http://www.discoverdevon.com) which has all the information and an order form.

OS maps for this walk:

- OS Explorer (1:25,000 scale) No. OL28 Dartmoor or No.113 Okehampton.
- OS Landranger (1:50,000 scale) No. 191 Okehampton and North Dartmoor.