

## **Drake's Dartmoor - Leats, Tramways and Railways**

The south west corner of Dartmoor has many associations with Sir Francis Drake, and this has led to the promotion of this area, its history, facilities and walks, as Drake's Dartmoor.

This walk starts and finishes in Yelverton, one of the main centres of Drake's Dartmoor, taking in historic leats and an old tramway, before returning along the line of one of Devon's long-distance walks, the West Devon Way, which also passes through the area.

### **Fact File**

Yelverton is roughly mid-way between Plymouth and Tavistock and is well-served by buses between the two. It also has links to and from local villages and there is a direct bus to and from Exeter during the summer and on weekends throughout the year. For timetable details call Traveline on 0870 608 2 608 or visit [www.taveline.org](http://www.taveline.org)

**Walk Length:** 5.5 miles/8.5km; a slightly shorter version of 4.5 miles/7km is also described. There are three stiles and one long, steady but never especially steep climb of 280 feet/85m.

**Facilities:** As well as buses Yelverton has shops and pub; there is also a car park and public toilets adjacent to the start and finish point; pub at Clearbrook.

### **The Walk**

**The walk starts in Yelverton, outside the entrance to St. Paul's Church.**

As Devon towns go, Yelverton is not very old. Even the church is relatively new, dating from only 1912. The town is essentially a product of the coming of the railway in the mid-1800s when a station was built near the old Elford Town Farm. The Devon dialectal pronunciation of Elford Town was used as the station name, hence Yelverton.

**With your back to the church turn left. Walk through the car parking area and along the tarmac path parallel to the Plymouth road. This leads to a path that continues ahead next to a stone-faced ditch on the left. This part of the walk is on the West Devon Way, and there will be waymarks.**

The ditch is the Plymouth or Drake's Leat. It was built by Sir Francis Drake between 1589 and 1591 to take water from Dartmoor to Plymouth and thus ensure the city had a reliable water supply. A superb engineering achievement, it was extremely successful, continuing its job until Burrator reservoir was built in 1893.

**After a little while the leat bears away to the left, then the main track goes right. Continue straight ahead here, through a gate.**

A little further on another leat joins the path, this time on the right. This is the Devonport Leat. This one was built between 1793 and 1801, when the dockyard at Plymouth was growing enormously. At that time Devonport was not part of the city, and Plymouth was not happy to allow Devonport to use its water. Consequently a new leat was constructed by the Plymouth Dock Water Company, 28 miles long. Like Drake's Leat, this also lasted until the building of Burrator Reservoir.

**Continue ahead next to the leat. A little further on again, the path joins the line of an old tramway, coming from the right.**

This is the Plymouth and Dartmoor Tramway. It was built between 1823 and 1827 as a horse-drawn route over the 24 miles between Princetown and Plymouth to carry farm produce, peat and granite, although only the granite trade was ever profitable for the tramway.

Notice the bridge over the leat on the right and also, continuing, the granite setts on the tramway floor. These were the equivalent of railway sleepers, the rails being bolted to these setts.

**The tramway leads to a junction of surfaced tracks. Follow the middle one ahead.**

The path this far can be a little muddy in winter. If it is too wet, it can be avoided by following the path alongside the Plymouth road and then turning left along a surfaced track which crosses the leat. This arrives at the track on the main route; turn right to continue.

**Continue ahead, still next to the Devonport Leat. After a little way the West Devon Way is signed going off to the left. Continue straight ahead here, on the tarmac path, leaving the West Devon Way.**

The West Devon Way will be our return route to here later.

**Keep on, next to the leat.**

Views left now open up over the valley of the River Meavy to Dartmoor on the horizon, marked by a series of rugged tors.

Continuing ahead, the Plymouth or Drake's Leat reappears on the left. Then, as the tarmac path loses its surface, granite setts again appear intermittently, reminding us that this is still the route of the Plymouth and Dartmoor Tramway.

**Continue along the track to arrive at an area of open moorland and a junction of surfaced paths. Continue ahead here and then on to another unsurfaced track past a red post box. Keep ahead to reach a junction of paths just before a gate across the main track. Go right here, along a track going very slightly uphill.**

Very soon the Devonport Leat is crossed.

**The track reaches the open moorland of Roborough Down. Keep to the left hand edge of the moorland ahead.**

This is still the line of the tramway, rejoined after leaving it for a short length.

**Follow the obvious track as it descend slightly to the left. The Plymouth or Drake's Leat appears on the left again after a little way. Continue ahead on the main track.**

Soon, setts reappear, confirming we are following the tramway. This length offers extensive views over Roborough Down, the western edge of Dartmoor. This was an area of Iron Age occupation and, indeed, seems to have been farmed until medieval times.

**Where another track joins keep on ahead then follow round to the left to reach a stone barn. Bear left here to a road.**

The barn just passed is actually a warehouse associated with the tramway. Such warehouses along the tramway were known as wharfs, indicating the influence of the canals on these early tramways.

Where the tramway track reaches the road the Plymouth Leat is crossed. The leat here is in exceptionally good condition, lined with granite slabs.

There is a shorter version of the walk which can be taken from here. This will also avoid another length of the full route which can be muddy after wet weather. For this option, continue down the road to the village visible ahead. This is Clearbrook, and for those in need of refreshment there is a pub here. Continue through the village to the bridge over the River Meavy in the valley bottom. Turn left just before the bridge for the return leg on the West Devon Way. Pick up the description below at\*.

**For the full walk, take the narrower lane opposite, signposted to Goodameavy.**

The tramway and leats are now left behind as the route descends, gently at first and then more steeply, into the beautiful valley of the River Meavy. There are splendid views over Dartmoor, including the village of Shaugh Prior on its hillside above the valley woodlands.

**At a road junction at the bottom turn left, under the old railway bridge. Follow the footpath over the stile on the left just before the bridge over the Meavy.**

The walk has now rejoined the West Devon Way for the return leg to Yelverton. Look out for the waymarks.

**Go through the field and on along the path between the river and the railway embankment.**

The railway was the line between Plymouth and Yelverton, from where the main route went on to Tavistock with a branch going to Princetown, following the upper part of the line of the tramway for most of the way. The Tavistock railway opened in 1858 and was closed in 1962.

**At the next open area keep ahead, next to the embankment, and this path leads to a stile by the river. Continue ahead to another stile, then follow the riverside to arrive at a road by a bridge.**

This is Hoo Meavy Bridge, dating back to the 1700s.

**Bear left along the road for a short way then continue straight ahead where the road bends left, to go along a narrow lane next to the river.**

The shorter option described above rejoins here.

**\* Continue along the lane next to the river.**

The Meavy is a beautiful river which rises high on Dartmoor near Princetown and flows through Burrator Reservoir and then south to join the River Plym at Shaugh Bridge.

**The lane bears away from the river and begins to climb. Arriving at Yeoland House, go through the small gate which is ahead on the left and follow the path uphill alongside the railway embankment. At the junction at the end turn left, under the railway, and follow the surfaced track to the right then to the left, uphill.**

**Where the surfaced track goes off left downhill continue ahead, still uphill, on a slightly narrower and rougher track. Pass Elford Town Cottage and cross a leat.**

This is the Plymouth or Drake's Leat again, our route having now almost rejoined the outward leg.

**Bear right, next to the leat, to a junction. Continue ahead on the track, now retracing the first part of the outward route, to return to Yelverton.**

### **Further Information**

For details of the West Devon Way, there is an information pack available at local Tourist Information Centres, price £3. Alternatively, it may be obtained from the Discover Devon Information Service, Westacott Road, Barnstaple, EX32 8AW, telephone 0870 608 5531, price £4.50 including post and packing. Make cheques payable to Devon County Council and quote reference DTY/DP16.

For information on the wider network of walking routes in Devon, obtain the free leaflet "Discover Devon - Walking" from Tourist Information Centres or from the address given above, quoting reference DTY/DP04. Alternatively, visit the website [www.discoverdevon.com](http://www.discoverdevon.com), which has all the walks information.

For further information on Drake's Dartmoor, visit [www.drakesdartmoor.co.uk](http://www.drakesdartmoor.co.uk) The information includes further walks in the area by clicking on "what's on".

OS maps for this walk:

Landranger (1:50,000 scale) no. 201 Plymouth and Launceston.  
Explorer (1:25,000 scale no) OL28 Dartmoor.