

WALK AND OBSERVE: DARTMOOR

Walking Routes to Dartmoor National Park using Public Transport

National Parks: New Perspectives



INTRODUCTION



View from Nine Maidens Stone Circle



Hi, I'm Erika and I'm an artist and outdoors enthusiast based in Devon. I love walking and climbing on Dartmoor and have been exploring its moorland since a young age. I'm one of the holders of the National Parks: New Perspectives bursaries, funded by Campaign for National Parks, and I have created this leaflet as part of my project which explores public transport access to Dartmoor National Park.

I'd like to give people living in Exeter and the surrounding areas the opportunity to access Dartmoor via public transport. I hope that by guiding you to getting to the moors using a bus

or a train, and showing you short, accessible walks from the stops, that you might be encouraged to visit the National Park through public transport again and share the experience with your families and friends.

I was lucky to be able to visit Dartmoor as a child, living relatively nearby. My secondary school often did trips to the moors after school to go climbing, or on weekends for Ten Tors training, so I've been lucky to have had access to the National Park in various ways growing up. However, I don't drive myself, and have noticed the hurdles that this might create for others who might want to experience Dartmoor without a car. There are so many activities and ways to explore the National Park - short strolls, longer walks, climbing, cycling, watersports, and so many others to explore. I think this opportunity for exploration of the outdoors is really important for all young people, and that everyone can take something from an experience on Dartmoor.

There's also the ecological impact to consider of multiple cars driving down the motorway to get there, driving on the moors, potentially causing erosion on the sides of the roads, in addition to air and noise pollution. By using public transport and walking to a location when we get there, we can reduce the impact of that journey on the National Park and its ecology and wildlife.

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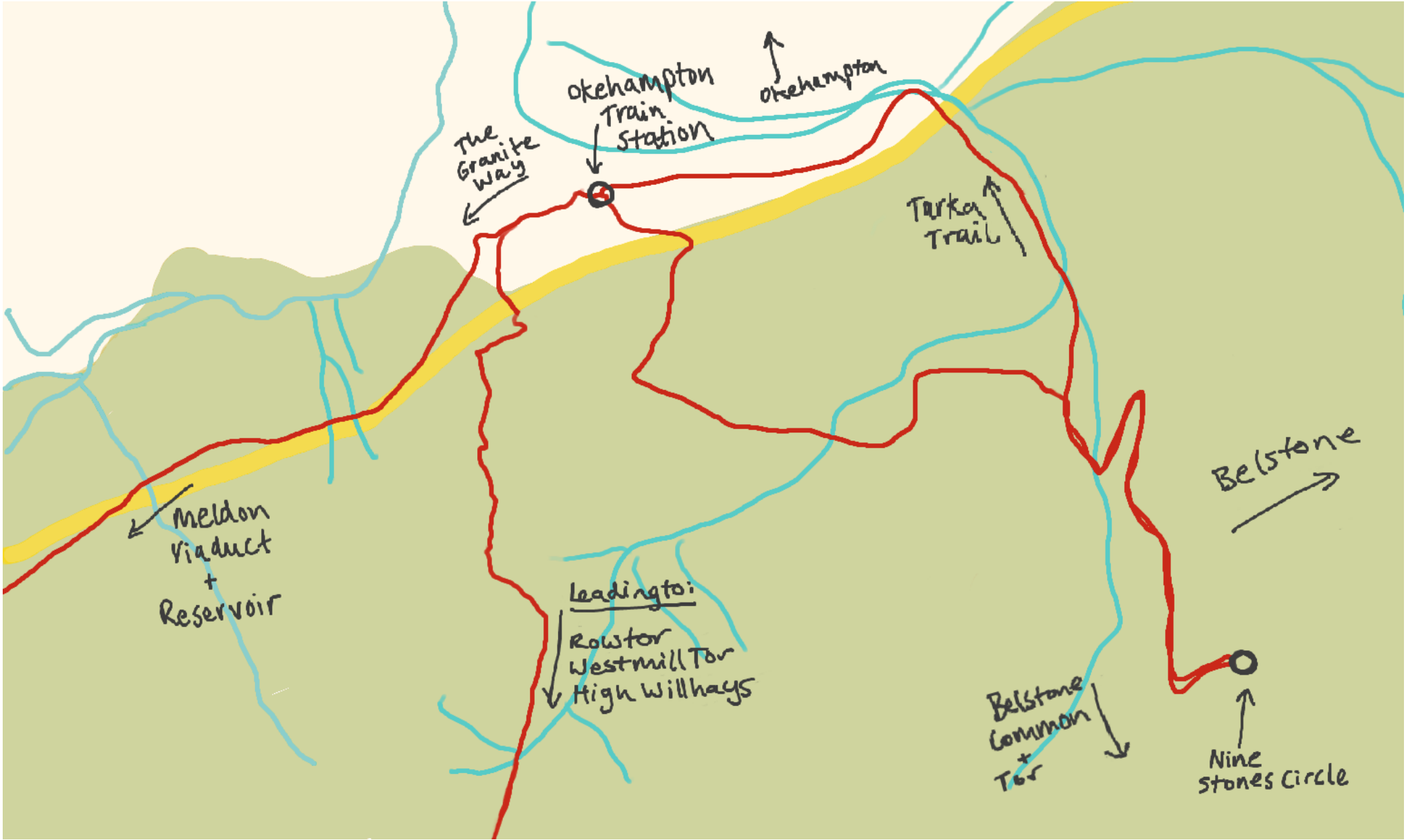


Crossing the stream on stepping stones

I led some guided walks for people who can't access the moors due to lack of transport, and also for those who were interested in exploring a more eco-friendly way of visiting Dartmoor. The walks were a way of observing our experience of travelling via public transport, and the experience of walking on Dartmoor when we get there. I wanted to make people aware of the journey as well as the destination by testing both the train and bus services to see how they compared. The main outcome of the project is to get people onto Dartmoor and to raise awareness of alternative ways of getting there. I hope that the walks and the company guided participants towards thinking about how they feel when on Dartmoor, and encouraged them to observe the surroundings beyond just walking through them.

In this publication I'll be sharing the reflections of the participants on the walks, sharing the routes I've tried and tested, and evaluating my experience of hosting the guided walking groups. I hope this book encourages you to give the walks and transport options a go too!

THE ROUTES: STARTING FROM OKEHAMPTON STATION



A sketch map showing walking routes from the train station.

THE ROUTES: STARTING FROM OKEHAMPTON STATION

NINE STONES CIRCLE CIRCULAR WALK:

Time: approx 2 ½ hrs without stops.

Difficulty: *** - some steep hills, some uneven ground.

Views: *****

This was the first walk I devised for the 18+ walk. The route takes you up to Belstone Common where you can see views across the valley and have a look at the Nine Stones Circle. On the way back you can walk back along the Tarka Trail, following the river, and getting to see some beautiful rapids/waterfalls flowing off the moors. I really enjoyed the variety of landscapes on this walk - once you get away from the A30 you're into proper moorland, with steep valleys, ancient wooded areas and peaceful river paths. There are lots of great spots to rest, and potential to extend the walk and add variants to the loop once across the river and towards the common. You could even walk via Belstone to check out the village (and the pub!) on the way back.



The view from Nine Maidens Stone Circle, the furthest stop on our walk.



Meldon Viaduct Bridge

MELDON QUARRY, VIADUCT AND RESERVOIR:

Time: 40mins-1 hr each way to the quarry/viaduct - options to go further to reservoir

Difficulty: * - flat, tarmacked terrain throughout.

Views: **

This was the walk I had originally planned for the Family Friendly session, however I found that although accessible and flat, the views were largely uninteresting until you reached the quarry about 40mins walk in. I would recommend this route for people wanting to go cycling as it's flat and well tarmacked, and you could go much further and see more interesting things by bike. Once you get to the quarry and Viaduct area, there's lots to see, with moorland views and remnants of the history of the area. There's the potential to walk further on to the reservoir and beyond, but the initial 40 minute walk in to that point might limit the extra distance you can go. You can hire bikes from outside of the train station, so this would be a great option to explore for budding cyclists!



A sketch map showing walking routes from the Steps Bridge bus stop.

STEPS BRIDGE TO CLIFFORD BRIDGE CIRCULAR WALK:

Time: approx 2 ½ hrs without stops.

Difficulty: **

Views: ****

This is a walk suitable for adults and families using the Dartmoor Explorer Bus. The walk can be shortened and extended, and is largely flat terrain. There are many paths following the river that all link up, so it's easy to navigate as you always end up linking back to the other paths. To make it a circular walk as we did, there's a bit of road walking to get to Clifford Bridge, where you can cross the river and walk back down the other side on footpaths. At Clifford there's the option to keep walking up the river, all the way to Fingle Bridge which would make a much longer walk. The path back to Steps Bridge from Clifford Bridge is uphill at the end, so if you wanted to avoid hills it would be better to walk back down the side of the river that you came. The walk is great in spring with the fields of daffodils, bluebells and wild garlic flowers, and would be nice and shaded in the summer. There are lots of shallow areas along the river with easy access points for a paddle too.



The River Teign from Clifford Bridge

“For me, Dartmoor National Park is an essential escape from everyday life and the urban environment. It’s a landscape which gives me a sense of place and belonging that is impossible to find in the city or the lower lying, more agricultural areas of Devon. Although I usually drive, the ease of visiting by public transport left me pleasantly surprised. I think that public awareness and perception of car-less access to Dartmoor is poor, and I strongly support efforts to get the word out and share Dartmoor’s beauty with a wider audience.”



Walking up to Belstone Tor from the Nine Stones Circle

OBSERVATIONS AND FEEDBACK

I asked the participants on the walks what they thought about the experience, and whether they would do it again. As someone who is very used to the Dartmoor landscape I was interested in knowing if the walks I planned met the expectations of those who had never been!

“Its been an amazing trip! My first hiking trip and first Dartmoor experience. I’m really glad that I joined today!”

I also wanted to find out if the participants thought the public transport was accessible and affordable, to see if it was a viable option for those without a car or those who wanted to use public transport more often for ecological reasons.

Participants on the walk



Dartmoor Ponies on the walk from Okehampton

HOW CONVENIENT AND AFFORDABLE WAS THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT?
WOULD YOU USE IT AGAIN?

“Its quite affordable and straightforward enough for someone who’s not familiar with this region”

“YES! Affordable tickets and reasonable commuting time, and easy access to Dartmoor from the train station.”

“Surely yes! I don’t drive so I have to use public transport.”



Stopping to take in the open moorland views!



The East Okement River

TELL US ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE OF THE WALK:

DID THE WALK REPRESENT YOUR PERCEPTION OF DARTMOOR?

“The area was beautiful and challenging enough. There were good places to stop and rest and it wasn’t too crowded or deserted.”

“This was my first time coming to Dartmoor for a walk and by using public transportation, and I’m really glad to learn that someone like me with no car can still enjoy the nature.”

“Every bit as beautiful as they say it is.”

“Yes and no. I’ve always imagined Dartmoor being rural and remote. I would not have imagined it being accessible! I like it!”

“I’ve always thought of Dartmoor as a remote, deserted area, but this walk changed my perception.”

Bright Gorse and blue skies!



Lambs in the fields in spring



Dartmoor Ponies with Rowtor, West Mill Tor and Yes Tor



Stepping stones across the stream



Ancient, mossy woodland



Valley with the East Okement river



Nine Stones Circle on Belstone Common



The East Okement river

Stone path on the Tarka Trail



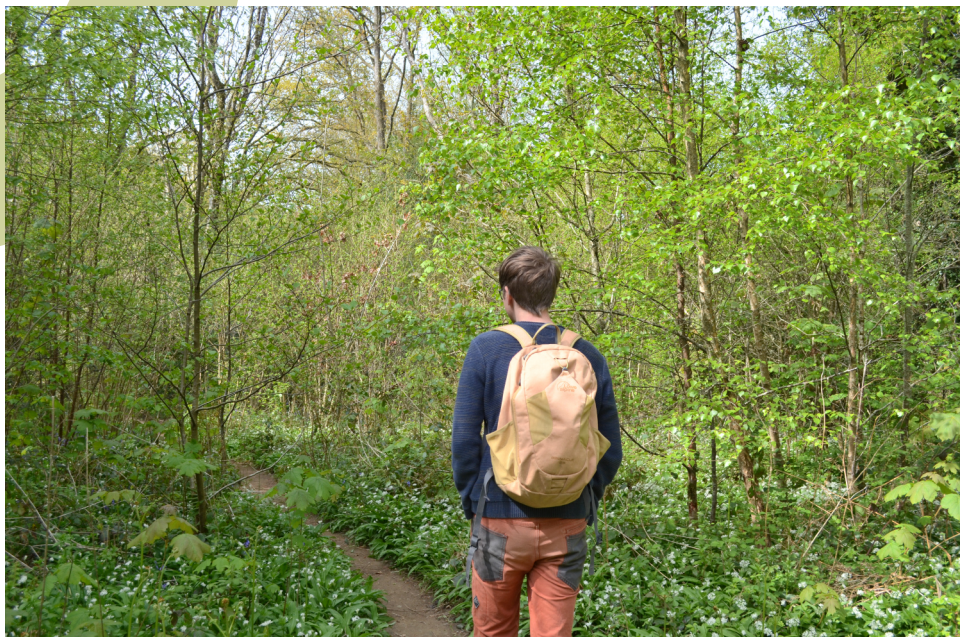
Waterfall on the East Okement river



Bluebells and wild garlic flowers at Steps Bridge in April



Crossing the river at Clifford Bridge



Footpaths through the woods



Green forests on the return path

When I first sat down and mapped a walk from Okehampton train station, I wasn't sure what to expect. I chose a point about an hour away from the station, plotting a circular route there and back. I worried that the landscape might not be that varied, being so close to the town and the main road. But when I tested the walk, on an unusually warm weekend in March, I was surprised to see the variation and beauty of the route.

Dartmoor's landscape is so vast and unique, with enough places to visit and walks to try to never get bored of. Some of Dartmoor's most picturesque locations and views are accessible by the public transport routes, so whether you're interested in going on a walk on the moorland, a gentle stroll by a river, or exploring a Dartmoor town or village there are now ways of getting there without relying on a car.

The remoteness of the walks we did surprised me, especially the circular walk we from Okehampton station to Belstone Common. I never knew that it was possible to feel like you were on the middle of the moors while only being an hours walk from the train station! The locations were connected enough to be easy to access through public transport, but remote enough to feel like you had left the city and had a day out in nature.

It was lovely being able to take people out onto the moor, sharing the landscape with them, and getting to know them along the way. I hope that in the future I can continue to organise walking socials, and hopefully get other participants to share and lead their own walks from public transport routes.

I hope that the routes and stories in this book have inspired you to give the walks a go for yourself. Whether you venture out on your own, with your family, or with friends there are a myriad of walks and options beyond the ones suggested in this book. Make sure to look at the timetables and stops of the transport, and to plan your routes before you set off. Also remember to take care of the National Park while you're enjoying it - leave no trace and enjoy the memories of the walk through photos only.

Make sure to check out the webpage below to find written descriptions of the walks and extra information on how to access Dartmoor using public transport:

<http://cnp.org.uk/news/new-perspectives-erikas-story>

For more information about my projects visit: <https://www.erikacann.com/>

WITH THANKS TO:

Laura Williams and Campaign for National Parks, for offering me the opportunity to explore this topic through my National Parks: New Perspectives bursary.

Tom Palmer from Ocean City Media, for all of your help and advice throughout.

Dartmoor National Park, for sharing my walks with their community.

Great Western Railway, for help with the distribution of this book.

The participants of the walks, for the great company and invaluable feedback.





National Parks: New Perspectives bursary

ERIKA CANN 2023