

1 Follow this path, soon crossing another (level with a gate/path sign in the wall right). The path heads along the northern slopes of Royal Hill, with far-reaching views to the right. Eventually the path becomes more obvious, stretching away into the distance, uphill - and you'll spot the telecommunications mast on North Hessary tor at Princetown.

Please note that the route is not waymarked from here until Point 2 at Bullpark.

Where the path becomes surfaced you're following the 'Conchies Road', constructed by conscientious objectors incarcerated at Dartmoor Prison during World War I: it makes for an easier walk over the western end of Royal Hill, after which the path levels, passing a track junction. Tor Royal - the grand house Tyrwhitt had built for himself - comes into view above trees ahead.

Descend towards woodland, bearing right past another track junction. Go through a gate (a plaque records the efforts of the conscientious objectors) and descend past a house (Bullpark).



"Conchies' Road" near Princetown



Dartmoor Prison

During World War I Dartmoor Prison was handed over to the military authorities and became the Princetown Work Centre or Settlement. In 1917 more than 1000 conscientious objectors (COs) were moved into the prison and remained there until 1919 engaged in work of 'national importance'. When they returned home these highly principled men were shunned; finding employment was almost impossible and children of these 'conchies' were singled-out for harsh treatment by bullies and teachers alike.

Many of the COs were put to work outside on seemingly pointless initiatives. A large tract of moorland was enclosed in a huge wall (now known as Conchies Wall) and the land was turned into a ploughed field, known to this day as Conchies Field.

Another work party built a road, seemingly going nowhere across the open moors. This 'Conchies Road' was part of a larger plan to build two new farms for the Duchy of Cornwall on Royal Hill, southeast of Princetown. It comprised a main road and two avenues to the farms. The plan was to turn that moorland into two productive farms using 'free' labour, albeit forced. Today the Conchies Road is often referred to as 'The Road to Nowhere'.

2 Turn right as signed (also to Bachelor's Hall). The track passes through gates and runs between fields, bearing right to a path junction. Turn left, uphill, to cross the Devonport Leat and go through a gate. Ascend on a rough track that eventually curves left and levels, via another gate - with very good views of HMP Dartmoor - then bears right to reach Two Bridges Road on the edge of Princetown.

Turn left, soon picking up the pavement, to reach the centre of Princetown, crossing Tor Royal Lane and passing Fox Tor Café.

3 Cross the access lane immediately before the Plume of Feathers inn then turn right across Plymouth Hill to reach the former Duchy Hotel, now home to the Dartmoor National Park Visitor Centre. Pass the building and bear slightly left towards the car park, passing the public toilets. By an information board take the narrow path ahead, then walk through the car park to reach the entrance on the lane leading to Station Cottages.



The centre of Princetown

The extraordinary village of Princetown owes its origins largely to Thomas Tyrwhitt, a close friend of the Prince Regent (later George IV). In 1796 he was appointed auditor to the Duchy of Cornwall and set about developing the existing hamlet into 'Princetown' in honour of his friend. He had the railway built; in 1806 he laid the foundation stone for Dartmoor Prison, which opened in 1809 to accommodate French PoWs, at that time kept on prison hulks at Devonport. Today Princetown is home to the main Dartmoor National Park Visitor Centre, the best place to go for information on all things Dartmoor.

Turn left, passing the new whisky distillery building and the fire station. Near the Station Cottages sign bear left on a path signed 'Princetown Railway walking and mountain bike route', passing a small building (the last remaining commercial structure connected to Princetown station: carhorses, used to deliver goods locally, were stabled here). The fenced path runs alongside fields, passes a path junction, then heads out across the lower slopes of North Hessary Tor. The views are fantastic: from left to right (middle distance) is Hart Tor, then the great bulk of Sheepstor, Leather, Sharp and Leeden tors.

Please note that the route is not waymarked from this point until leaving the moor near Point 7.

It's a really easy walk - as you progress views into Cornwall open up ahead. A short cutting leads to an embanked section over a bridge, after which the old trackbed starts to bear right towards the quarries it was built to serve, and the views - now to the northwest - change again, encompassing an extraordinary range of tors: Swelltor and King's Tor, and in the distance Great Staple and Roos tors.

4 Reach a crossroads of tracks - the path right leads to Foggintor Quarry - at which point turn left, downhill (leaving the trackbed). Swelltor Quarry spoil heaps can be seen right. Descend steadily, kinking right then left, to re-join the old trackbed opposite a gate.

From 1820 to around 1938 Foggintor was one of the three great granite quarries of Dartmoor, along with Haytor and Merrivale. During the early 1840s Foggintor supplied the granite that was used to build famous London landmarks such as Nelson's Column and London Bridge. Locally it was used for a vast number of buildings, including Dartmoor Prison and nearby village of Princetown; the trackbeds of railways used to transport the granite can still be seen today. What was once a thriving mining community, home to as many as 400 people, is now just a memory, but the plentiful ruins are evidence of the site's importance in Victorian times. Stones from the houses and mining office were reused to build the North Hessary television mast above Princetown.

5 Turn left; the trackbed curves around the head of a small combe (a tributary of the River Walkham), soon passing under a bridge. There are good views to the battered remains of Swelltor across the combe. Ingra Tor, which has been in view for some time by the track, is soon reached

6 Turn right through a five-bar gate onto Open Access land and start heading down into the tributary valley.

7 Meet a track T-junction and turn left, soon crossing a cattle grid. To the right are great views of Vixen Tor across the Walkham valley. The track ends at another cattle grid and gate, where you pick up a tarmac lane and descend to a crossroads (Criptor Cross).

Keep straight on, descending steeply between high hedgebanks, to cross Ward Bridge over the Walkham. A steep climb up the other side gains another cattle grid and gate.

8 Bear right on an old lane (no longer suitable for vehicles) to ascend very steeply between walls to reach a tarmac lane on a bend. Keep straight on, passing the gates of a grand stone house which sits on the corner.

9 Take the first lane on the left, which descends gently to pass below Lady Modiford's School (founded as a charity school 300 years ago), the beautiful pinnacled church and manor house in Sampford Spiney: it's a really special spot. The lane then ascends steeply to a T-junction by a white cottage, opposite old barns.



Sampford Spiney Church

10 Turn left, following the lane along the lower slopes of Pew Tor. Pass a lane to Moortown, and keep walking in the direction of Whitchurch Common. A lane to 'By the Down' is passed, and next a lane to Horrabridge. A couple of paces later reach Warren's Cross.

The main DW (Lydford - Tavistock) joins from the right here.

Keep straight on, signed Whitchurch Down. Follow the road across the Down, which is shared with the golf course; it's easy to walk alongside the road on the close-cropped turf. The Pimple, our next port of call, comes into view ahead on the highest point of the Down. At the next staggered five-lane junction (Caseytown Cross) bear left towards Holwell and Whitchurch. Soon the Down spreads onto the left side of the road too; look out for a Millennium Stone to the right of the road, marking the Tavistock town boundary, just before a parking area.

11 As the road bears away left and heads towards Whitchurch bear right, passing a low bench. Take the middle of three broad grassy paths, heading steadily uphill and passing between stands of gorses on the upper slopes, to reach The Pimple (designed by the architect Sir Edwin Lutyens of Castle Drogo fame). Continue in the same direction downhill, heading for a wall corner (right). Follow the wall down to find a kissing gate onto a tarmac path. At the road turn left downhill through a residential area.



The Pimple

12 Where the road bears very slightly left (look for a DW sign on a telegraph pole) cross the road and head down a broad tarmac way to reach Deer Park Lane; continue downhill to meet Whitchurch Road. Cross over; turn right to find St John's Avenue on the left (just before the roundabout and Abbey Bridge).



Bedford Square, Tavistock

The flourishing market town of Tavistock is steeped in history. The 10th-century Benedictine Abbey was sacked by the Vikings; little remains today of the second abbey, granted a charter in 1105. It had a flourishing woollen industry and in 1395 became a stannary town. At the Dissolution the first Earl Bedford took over, and his descendant the Seventh Duke created the impressive range of 19th-century buildings in the town centre. The Bedfords owned Devon Great Consuls Mine in the Tamar Valley, the most productive source of copper in the world in the 1850s. The Tavistock Canal was constructed early in the 19th century to link the town with Morwellham Quay on the River Tamar, a bustling port.

Since 2006 Tavistock has justifiably been proud of its designation as gateway to the UNESCO Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site. The town is also the western end of the Abbots Way. The town's brilliant Pannier Market dates back over 900 years, and you'll find everything you need here or in the excellent range of independent shops.



St Eustachius Church, Tavistock