



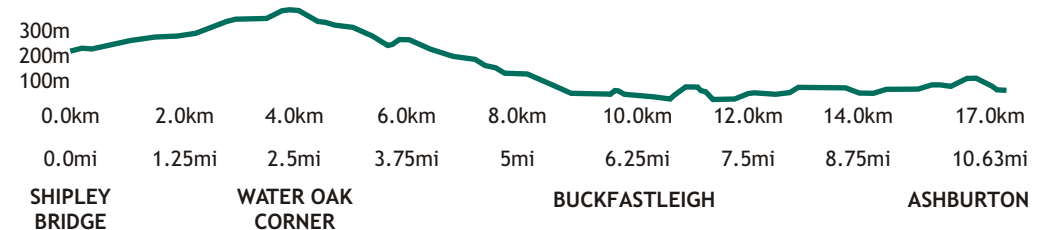
Explore Dartmoor - Walk the Dartmoor Way

www.dartmoorway.co.uk

Stage 2: Shipley Bridge to Ashburton

Start	SX 6808 6289 Shipley Bridge car park
Finish	SX 7561 6989 The Bullring, centre of Ashburton
Distance	10.5 miles / 16.75 km
Total ascent	1,469 ft / 448 m
Refreshments	Shipley Bridge (seasonal), Buckfastleigh, Ashburton
Public toilets	Shipley Bridge, Buckfastleigh, Ashburton
Tourist information	Buckfastleigh (The Valiant Soldier)

Elevation Profile



Please refer also to the Stage 2 map.

S This stage starts at the entrance to the car park at Shipley Bridge. Facing the car park turn right along the lane.



The River Avon above Shipley Bridge

POOR VISIBILITY OPTION

In times of poor visibility or if anxious about your route-finding abilities over moorland follow the lane over the River Avon (the Dartmoor Way cycle route is followed from Shipley Bridge to Buckfastleigh). The lane ascends steadily, with good views of Brent Hill at the brow of the hill. Descend, then ascend past Gingaford Cross and climb again to Bloody Pool Cross. Turn left (to Dockwell and Skerraton). This pretty undulating lane soon gives fabulous views across Skerraton Down, then descends to cross Gidley Bridge and reaches a T-junction. Turn left (Skerraton and Deancombe). Eventually a long and pretty descent gains a T-junction in Deancombe. Turn left, soon following the River Mardle and passing Coxhill Cross to reach houses on the edge of Buckfastleigh. At a T-junction opposite Duckspod Playing Fields turn left; turn right at the next junction; then right again down Bossell Road, signed to Town Centre. Turn left along New Road, then right (re-joining the main route).

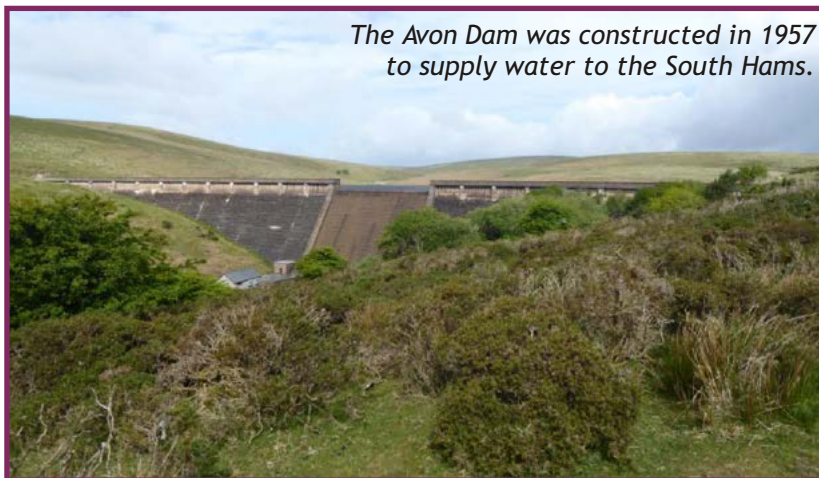
Immediately before the bridge over the River Avon turn left on a tarmac way (access lane to the Avon Dam Reservoir) and head upstream alongside beautiful pools and rapids (signed to Brockhill Ford and the Abbot's Way).

The immediate area has a rich history. Shipley Bridge car park is situated on the remains of the former Brent Moor china clay works. The raw material was transported here along a tramway from the Redlake workings northwest of the Avon Reservoir, which was constructed in the 1950s.

Ignore a lane left (to the treatment works), then pass round a gate. Immediately round the next bend look left to spot a small pedestal on a rocky bluff, a memorial to little Mary Meynell who lived at Brent Moor House, the scant remains of which are soon passed.

Brent Moor House, a substantial Victorian property, fell into disrepair and was finally demolished in the 1960s. In the 1900s the mansion became the Hunt master's lodge, and then in World War II a place where deaf children sheltered. After the war it was a youth hostel until the water company decided it should be shut down as it was downstream of the reservoir dam. The Royal Marines then used it as target practice and bombed it to pieces.

Above the western slope of the valley sits Rider's Rings, an enclosed Bronze Age settlement.



The Avon Dam was constructed in 1957 to supply water to the South Hams.

Please note that the route is not waymarked from this point until it reaches Point 3.

The lane bears right to cross the river and the landscape opens up, with sweeping views of the moorland valley slopes. Continue up the valley, ascending gently.

1 Just after crossing the Small Brook the lane curves left towards the dam; look for a rough unsigned track bearing off right, and head up it to pass a wire-fenced plantation, above which the dam and reservoir come into view.

From the right end of the dam pick up a rough and narrow path that heads up the eastern end of the reservoir, soon passing through a line of triangular stone pillars and a lifebelt on a metal pole.

Continue past the end of the reservoir, following a broad path up the east side of the shallow valley of the Brockhill Stream. Where this forks keep ahead (left path) across rough ground, soon negotiating a small gully; immediately bear left to find Brockhill Ford (a crossing point on the Abbot's Way).

2 Here turn right across rocky ground to pick up a larger path that ascends through low-growing gorse (Abbot's Way).

The Abbots Way is an ancient path across the moor, thought to have been the route used by monks travelling between Buckfast Abbey and Tavistock Abbey. The Abbots Way Challenge Walk, a 23-mile (37km) walk from Buckfast Abbey to Tavistock, is held on the first Sunday of October each year.

Cross the top of Dean Moor, soon enjoying far-reaching views - Hameldown, Chinkwell, Honeybag, Hound and Rippon Tors - then descend to reach a small plantation and gate at Water Oak Corner.

Pass through the gate (signed to Cross Furzes) and follow the bridlepath ahead, dropping into and out of small combe (crossing a stream) then ascending through a gate onto Lambs Down (tall poles mark the route). In May the meadows here are flooded with bluebells.



Lambs Down

Follow the obvious path across the grassy sward, eventually descending gently and passing through a gate. Head downhill through a plantation, then go through a gate by enormous beech trees to meet a path junction. Keep straight on through another gate to cross the Dean Burn on a granite clapper bridge. The track ahead ascends to a lane junction.



Clapper Bridge near Cross Furzes

Cross the lane and head downhill (signed to Buckfast and Ashburton), initially under trees and between banks of wildflowers for about 1½ miles.

3 Where the lane ascends very slightly then levels, look for a sign on the right - 'Button' - and turn right down the farm drive, via a gate (the footpath sign is in the hedge beyond the gate). Pass farm buildings and the farm house, then bear left. Look out for a footpath arrow on a gatepost on the right, and cross the stile.

Head left along the top edge of a big pasture field. At the end pass over a stile into pretty woodland; the next stile gains another field. Keep along the right edge of two fields, linked by stiles, then continue down the right end of the next field (decorated with bits of old farm machinery), ducking behind old farm buildings. Meet a farm track at a footpath sign and keep ahead, downhill, between walls. Go through a gate just above the farmhouse (Bilberryhill) and continue downhill to meet a lane on a bend.

Keep straight on through the pretty Mardle valley. Eventually the lane ascends over the brow of a hill, then descends (Jordan Street) into the edge of Buckfastleigh between rows of old cottages. Meet Chapel Street on a bend (Market Street left) and keep straight on, passing New Road and then a terrace of weavers' cottages (Tenterloft Cottage), evidence of the town's once-thriving woollen industry.

Buckfastleigh, a former woollen and tanning town on the River Mardle, has much to recommend it. The Dartmoor Way passes The Valiant Soldier - 'the pub where time was never called' - which has been frozen in time since the 1960s, next to the TIC on Fore Street.



Meet a road junction (car park/toilets along Plymouth Road right) and bear left along Fore Street through the heart of town. Look out for The Valiant Soldier and museum, then follow the road as it bears left (Station Road), crossing the River Mardle by The Orchard Millennium Green (picnic tables).

4 Just after crossing the river turn left up a long flight of cobbled stone steps (flanked by banks of wild garlic in May).

Greater Horseshoe bats often flit around the steps here and out into the wider landscape, pursuing insects around dense hedges, cattle-grazed pastures and wildflower grasslands.

EASIER OPTION

If you want to avoid this up-and-down excursion keep straight on along the road to pass the South Devon Railway and re-join the route at the Dart Bridge roundabout.



The South Devon Railway, a preserved steam line (the commercial line closed in 1962), runs trains south along the Dart valley to Staverton and Totnes. The town hit the headlines in the late 1930s with the nationally important discovery in a local cave system of the fossilised bones of many extinct animals from 125,000 years ago.

Pass through a kissing gate, after which the path narrows, soon levelling off. At the top of the hill the path bears right; look out for a concrete structure in the field left, marking the entrance to Baker's Pit (cavern): the limestone outcrop on which you stand is famed for its caves.

The path ends at a lane turning circle by Buckfastleigh's ruined church of the Holy Trinity which comes into view ahead (worth a visit).



Burnt down in an arson attack in 1992 the church has been preserved as a monument. The location high above Buckfastleigh is eerily peaceful and is known for its association with 'things evil'. In the churchyard is the tomb of Squire Richard Cabell, which apparently had to be reinforced to keep his evil spirit contained. Legends about one particular member of the family include tales of black dogs breathing fire and racing across Dartmoor to howl around his tomb. Consequently it is easy to see why this family was the inspiration for the Sherlock Holme novel *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

To continue the route turn right to find a surfaced footpath heading downhill under trees. At the next footpath junction bear right, downhill, soon forking left on a narrow, rocky and uneven path that descends steeply (slippery in wet weather) to join a tarmac way (Fairies Hall) and emerge onto the pavement by the Dart Bridge roundabout.

The High Moor Link turns left along Buckfast Road towards Buckfast Abbey.



Buckfast Abbey is an astonishing structure, with an even more astonishing history. The original wooden abbey was founded in 1018, and rebuilt in stone by the Cistercians from 1147; it was dissolved in 1539 under Henry VIII. Local mill owner William Berry built a four-turreted mansion in the ruins (still in existence today) and in 1882 a group of six Benedictine monks from France set about rebuilding the abbey themselves, which took the next 30 years. Today fragments of medieval architecture sit comfortably alongside more modern construction. The welcoming Grange Restaurant is open to passing visitors, as is the visitor centre.

Cross Buckfast Road and follow the pavement to cross Dart Bridge over the River Dart. Before reaching the A38 turn left along the road signed to Ashburton and Princetown. Follow the pavement for about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile.

5 Where buildings come into view ahead turn left along a hedged track (DW/footpath sign). Pass through the right of two five-bar gates then follow a fenced path along the edge of sweeping fields (Buckfast Abbey estate). The path bears right and narrows alongside a

plantation (overgrown in summer, but is passable). At its end pass through a gate to meet a rough lane at the entrance to Blackmoor Farm.

Follow the lane ahead, soon descending to meet the road again, and turn left towards Ashburton. On reaching a cream-coloured house on the right turn left up a pretty hedged track that ascends steadily then drops past a farm. Bear right, passing the entrance to Summerhill Farm, to reach a T-junction (Dartmeet road). Cross over and follow a hedged track uphill to meet another lane; turn right to pass the Lavender House Hotel.

On meeting the Dartmeet road again keep straight on for a few paces, then bear left up Bowden Hill. The lane reduces to a rough track over the hilltop, then becomes surfaced again as it drops to meet West Street. Turn left, soon passing the Exeter Inn (where Sir Walter Raleigh was arrested for treason in 1603) to find the end of the stage **F** at The Bullring in the centre of Ashburton (the junction of North, West and East streets).

Ashburton is the largest town within Dartmoor National Park, and has a civilised feel (and an extensive range of antique shops and cafes!). One of the original Dartmoor stannary towns (responsible for administering the tin-mining industry), from 1305, the town's continued wealth - from tin and then cloth, with a regular market and two annual fairs - is demonstrated by its fine buildings, many with impressive 18th- and 19th-century facades. Unusually Ashburton still retains the Saxon office of Portreeve and a Court Leet. A historic Bread Weighing and Ale Tasting ceremony takes place in July, and a popular Food and Drink Festival in early September.

