



## Stage 6: Chagford to Okehampton

<b>Start</b>	SX 7004 8755 The Square, Chagford
<b>Finish</b>	SX 5878 9506 Fairlace Church, Okehampton (junction of George Street and Mill Road)
<b>Distance</b>	12.25 miles / 19.5 km
<b>Total ascent</b>	2,096 ft / 639 m
<b>Refreshments</b>	Chagford, Wonson (off route), South Zeal, Sticklepath (off route), Belstone, Okehampton
<b>Public toilets</b>	Chagford, South Zeal, Okehampton
<b>Tourist information</b>	Okehampton

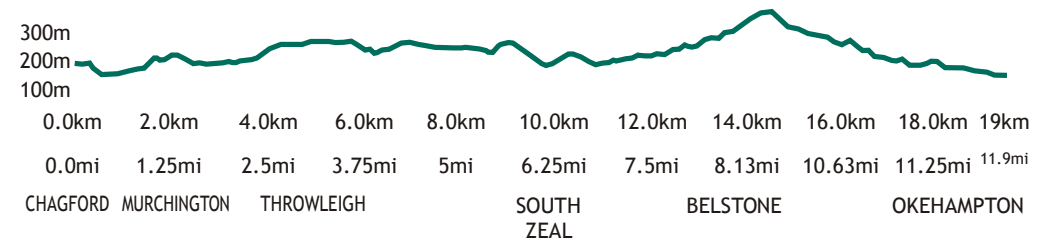
Please refer also to the [Stage 6 map](#).

**S** With your back to The Pepperpot (Chagford's old market house) and facing the Spar shop turn right down Mill Street, passing James Bowden & Son's wonderful emporium. Where the road bears left keep straight on, signed to Gidleigh and Throwleigh. The lane drops steeply between rocky cliffs to reach a crossroads at Factory Corner (Gidleigh Park is signed ahead).

Turn right (joining the route of the Two Moors Way), soon crossing the River Teign via Chagford Bridge (the TMW turns right just over the bridge).

**1** Just before the lane starts to ascend turn left through a gate on a footpath to Murchington. This pretty banked path soon reaches woodland and passes between old granite gateposts, then bears right; the River Teign can be spotted through the trees below. The path starts to descend, negotiating another pair of gateposts. About 25yd later follow the path left to cross a stream on stepping stones, and through a gate into a field. Head steadily up the left edge to find a gate onto a lane at the top.

### Elevation Profile



Turn left, downhill, to reach a lane corner (Murchington Cross). Keep straight on, passing the Murchington sign and ascending to Higher Murchington Cross. Crest the hill (with lovely views to Kestor Rock left) then descend into woodland. The lane winds on and approaches Highbury Bridge over the Blackaton Brook.

**2** Just before the bridge turn right over a stile into the Woodland Trust's beautiful Blackaton Copse.

The brook through Blackaton Copse has what may be the best brown trout spawning grounds on Dartmoor. If you have a dog or dogs with you, please make sure you keep them out of the water.

Follow the path through the copse (the lower path nearer the river is the official right of way), soon alongside the brook: it is just beautiful, and two riverside seats extremely tempting for a break! At the end of the copse cross a stile onto a lane.

Turn left across Blackaton Bridge; the lane soon bears sharp right past the entrance to Gidleigh Mill. At Coombe Farm turn right through a gate on a bridlepath and cross the Forder Brook. Pass a barn and bungalow, and go through another gate, passing to the right of barns. Head up a wonderful old green lane to emerge onto the lane at Providence. Turn left, uphill, past nineteenth-century Providence Chapel.

Reach a lane junction by the old phone box at Barrow Way Cross in Wonson.

The Northmoor Arms can be found a short distance down the lane to the right.

Keep straight on, signed Forder, Chapple and Gidleigh. Pass a cottage on the laneside (Cross Park).

**3** A few steps on, just before a pretty white cottage, turn right on a byway to Throwleigh - a long (and sometimes muddy) beautiful green lane (Deave Lane). At its end head down a tarmac drive to meet a lane in Throwleigh.



Leaving Throwleigh

Throwleigh is a delightful little village, far off the beaten track, with a lovely restored 15th-century granite church next to an early 16th-century church house built to house those working on the original church. The parish is home to a number of fine houses including Higher Shilstone, a fine 16th-century longhouse (a stone-built home in which people lived at one end, and animals at the other in the shippon, below a cross passage).



**4** Cross over to find steps and a gate leading into the graveyard of the church of St Mary the Virgin (awash with wild daffodils in spring), passing under a yew arch. At the south door turn left to pass the west end of the church. Head across the graveyard, and through a kissing gate in the corner into a meadow. Ahead a small gate leads into an orchard; at a footpath post turn right over a stile into a field.

Bear left, keeping right of two wonderful old oak trees (lovely views of Cosdon Hill), to find a footpath post against the hedge at the end. Bear left, downhill, skirting stands of gorse and dropping across wet ground to cross a stream (stepping stones) and then a stile. The onward path employs a boardwalk to negotiate marshy ground, then goes through a gate into a field. Keep along the left edge of two fields and through a gate onto a lane on a bend.

Keep straight on, uphill, and over a cattle grid onto the edge of Throwleigh Common. Keep ahead at the next lane junction, signed to South Zeal. Cross another cattle grid and a bridge over the Blackaton Brook. The quiet walled lane reaches Week Cross; keep straight on. Pass a couple of bridlepaths heading left up to Cosdon.

5 Look out for a Dartmoor Way sign on a telegraph pole (left) as the open ground of Ramsley Hill appears right. Bear right on a steeply ascending path that runs through bracken to reach the top of the hill. The path levels, with stunning views towards Cosdon (and the old Ramsley Mine chimney). Immediately past a house bear right through a parking area to meet a lane.



South Zeal

Turn left, downhill, with views towards South Tawton and church, to meet the old A30 road. Cross with care and head down the lane opposite. At the lane junction turn left, still descending, into South Zeal, then head up the main street, passing the Oxenham Arms, South Zeal Stores and later the King's Arms. Reach Zeal Head Cross and keep straight on, descending to reach the old A30 in Sticklepath.



Turn right along the road to take a look at Finch Foundry, a 19th-century water-powered forge. It was originally used to produce agricultural and mining hand tools and at its peak produced around 400 edge-tools a day. It remained active until 1960 when the roof collapsed, and has been in the hands of the National Trust since 1994. It contains examples of a tilt hammer, drop hammer and shear hammer, all powered by water wheels. The Trust maintains the forge in working order and gives demonstrations of the tools in action.



Tarka Bridge, Belstone Cleave

Cross with care to find a bridlepath to the moor, Skaigh Wood and Skaigh (now on the Tarka Trail). The path runs alongside the River Taw, then leaves the river to pass through a gate and reach a path junction. Turn right and follow the Taw upstream, soon passing through a gate; the path is narrow in places and frequently rocky, wet and uneven - take great care! Pass a weir and a river gauging station on the opposite bank. The river is beautiful here, and is soon crossed on the lovely 'Henry Williamson' bridge.

Author Henry Williamson is best known for his evocative novel *Tarka the Otter*, written while he was living in North Devon and first published in 1927. The book tells the story of the life and death of a male otter in Williamson's 'Country of the Two Rivers': the Rivers Taw and Torridge.

Once over follow the path ahead, keeping straight on at the first fork then bearing right through the trees to meet a track.

**6** Turn left, soon passing another footbridge over the Taw. Follow the path on through Belstone Cleave - it's rough and wet in places - eventually ascending the valley side to meet a path T-junction.

**7** Turn left; the path emerges onto the open ground of Belstone's Great Green, passing a seat which enjoys stunning views down Belstone Cleave and to the moor beyond. Bear half right across the green, uphill, towards buildings, to meet a lane junction to the left of picnic tables.

For the Old School Tearoom, situated behind the old Methodist Chapel, turn right along the lane.

Belstone has a wonderful position overlooking Cosdon Hill, which rises to 1805ft (550m) above the valley of the River Taw. Copper was worked locally in the 19th century. The ridgeline of the lofty Belstone Tors, to the south of the village, is crossed by the Irishman's Wall, said to have been built to enclose land against the wishes of the locals; as a result it was never completed.



Follow the lane ahead past The Tors Inn (with church behind) to reach a T-junction opposite the old telegraph office.

Turn left, within a few paces reaching a narrow lane heading off right.

#### POOR VISIBILITY OPTION

In times of poor visibility or if anxious about your route-finding abilities over moorland turn right down the lane and start to head out of the village. Pass a bridlepath to West Cleave and the East Okement valley (left). The lane starts to descend gently; pass another bridlepath to West Cleave, then cross a cattle grid. A few paces on turn left over a stile on a footpath to Fatherford. Cross the field, aiming for a gate and footpath sign, with views towards Okehampton. The right of way differs from the direction indicated by the sign, so make sure to pass through the gate and turn right, following the hedgebank downhill. Cross a stile at the bottom; continue downhill along the left edge of two fields. The path bears left alongside a stream, which is crossed on a small granite slab bridge. Cross a narrow meadow, and pass through a kissing gate onto a lane. Turn left; go under the A30, and then the railway bridge. At the lane T-junction (Fatherford) turn left, downhill. On reaching a parking area turn right through a gate into Ball Hill Conservation Area, re-joining the main route.

Keep ahead, up a dead-end lane, to pass Belstone Waterworks and then through a gate onto the moor (Watchet Hill). Follow the track alongside a granite wall, soon enjoying fantastic views towards Dartmoor's highest northwest corner: Yes Tor and High Willhays.

Please note that the route is not waymarked from this point until it reaches the footbridge across the East Okement river.

Where the wall bears away right bear half-right off the track on a broad grassy path that meets another wall corner (with lovely views up the valley of the East Okement river). Follow the wall downhill to meet a path running along the valley.

**8** Turn right, soon passing below the atmospheric ruin of Watchet Hill Cottage, after which the path starts to descend gently below stands of gorse. Where the wall on the right bears away keep straight on across the common.

**9** About 200yd later, at a clear path junction (by a square granite block), turn sharp left downhill, dropping steadily into the valley. Look out for a footbridge over the river, and cross over.

Turn right and pick your way downstream; the path is rocky and difficult in places. Pass a footpath forking uphill left, and then a spectacular waterfall, and continue to follow the river. Eventually the path bears away from the river through widely spaced oaks and through a gap in a mossy wall, then crosses the Moor Brook on a narrow railed footbridge to meet a path junction in West Cleave.

Follow the signed path right, continuing down the East Okement valley, negotiating a section of 'bonded' stepping stones across a particularly wet stretch. You'll soon hear the traffic thundering over the A30 dual carriageway viaduct (something of a surprise!). At another path junction keep ahead to pass under the viaduct: a second viaduct seen ahead through the trees carries the Exeter - Okehampton railway line. Pass through a gate to reach another path junction and turn right over the East Okement on Charlotte's Bridge (named in memory of a child who died when crossing the swollen river on her pony in 2001). Pass under the railway viaduct and go through a gate, then head up the lane.

**10** At the end of the parking area turn left through a gate into Ball Hill Conservation Area. This pretty wooded path soon climbs high above the river (note a leat below) then descends before levelling past fields. Pass through a gate (lane end right) and keep straight on (don't bear left towards the river) through another gate. The made path continues along the bottom edge of fields to reach a road at the entrance to Okehampton College car park. Head along the road, alongside the leat.

Reach a residential area; where the road starts to bear slightly right (there's a DW sign on a telegraph pole) turn left down steps by the mill. Cross the road and turn right, then follow signs left to reach the end of a car park. Turn left down steps, then second left down more steps, to walk alongside the West Okement river. When level with a footbridge turn left to re-meet the road, then right along the pavement. Cross the East Okement again and pass the entrance to Simmons Park, then cross Kempley Road to reach Fairplace Church. **F**

Okehampton has suffered mixed fortunes over the years. It developed as a market town, and a staging post on the road to London. The railway arrived in 1867, with regular services ending in 1972. Its livestock market ended in 1958, after a run of almost 900 years. It is perhaps best known today as being home to Okehampton Camp, built in 1893; parts of Dartmoor have been used for military training since 1873. Okehampton Camp is also well known for hosting the Ten Tors Challenge every May, involving 2400 teenagers who undertake a strenuous walking and camping expedition on the moor.