



## Stage 7: Okehampton to Lydford

<b>Start</b>	SX 5788 9506 Fairplace Church, Okehampton (junction of George Street and Mill Road)
<b>Finish</b>	SX 5099 8478 Village car park, Lydford
<b>Distance</b>	9.75 miles / 15 km
<b>Total ascent</b>	1,397ft / 426m
<b>Refreshments</b>	Okehampton, Prewley, Sourton (off route), Lake (off route), Lydford
<b>Public toilets</b>	Okehampton, Meldon Reservoir (off route), Lydford
<b>Tourist information</b>	Okehampton

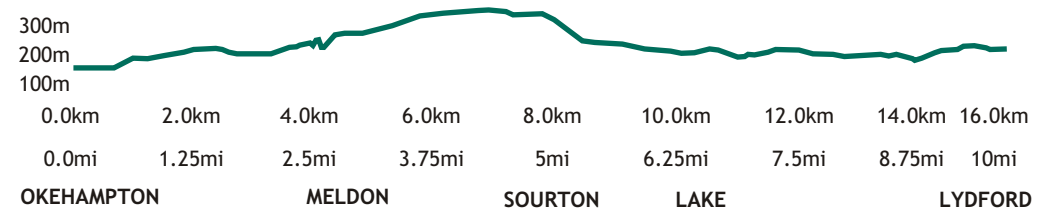
Please refer also to the [Stage 7 map](#).

**S** From the church cross the road then head up Castle Road, following signs to Okehampton Castle (part of this stage is shared with the Two Castles Trail, and most of it with the West Devon Way). Where the road bears right to cross the West Okement river (at the entrance to the Made-Well Foundation - the old hospital) keep ahead on a tarmac way between the drive and the river. Pass through a gate and over a boardwalk to reach a path junction ([a footbridge right leads to Okehampton Castle](#)).

**1** Three paths cross the grassy sward ahead. Our route bears half-left along the middle path (signed to Meldon Viaduct), soon entering oak woodland and ascending. Keep ahead at a path crossroads to reach a lane. (If you look back across the valley you may be able to spot the ruins of Okehampton's Norman castle between the trees.)

Turn right to reach the grounds of Okehampton Golf Club. Where the tarmac way bears left towards the club house follow the bridlepath straight on across the golf course (look out for flying golf balls!). At a fork in the track keep straight on, passing a flagpole, to reach the end of the golf course by the tee for Hole 10.

### Elevation Profile



Cross a stream via a footbridge and go through a gate into a field. Head along the bottom edge; at a path junction keep straight on, passing farm buildings, and through a gate at field end. Follow an enclosed path to the farm drive; turn left to reach the road at the entrance to Minehouse Farm.

Turn left, uphill, and cross the A30 dual carriageway. Opposite a parking area (shelter and bench) turn left on a bridlepath to 'Meldon Reservoir and moor', an initially gentle ascent through pretty oak woodland (carpeted with bluebells in May).

Keep ahead at an early fork and then at two path junctions before ascending under Meldon Viaduct, (see next page), curving left up steps to reach the old railway trackbed (now The Granite Way multi-use route). There's a handy bench on the opposite side of the track.

**2** Cross the viaduct, enjoying magnificent views upvalley to the dam of Meldon Reservoir and the moor beyond. Pass under a bridge, and then over another.

**3** Immediately over the bridge turn left to leave the Granite Way and drop to a lane junction (lane to Meldon Reservoir opposite).



**Meldon Viaduct** carried the London and South Western Railway across the West Okement valley. It took three years to build and opened to rail traffic in 1874. Usage was restricted to certain classes of locomotive because the structure had an axle load limit. Although regular services were withdrawn in 1968, the viaduct was used for shunting by a local quarry. In the 1990s the remaining single line was removed after it was deemed too weak to carry rail traffic.

A scheduled monument, this is one of only two surviving railway bridges in the United Kingdom that uses wrought iron lattice piers to support the cast iron trusses. Nearby Meldon Quarry was developed from 1897 to supply track ballast and other stone products for the railway. It was privatised in 1994.

The crossing is now also used by The Dartmoor Way Cycle Route, The Granite Way (a cycle route skirting the western side of Dartmoor) and Sustrans NCN27 which runs from Ilfracombe on the North Devon coast to Plymouth.

#### POOR VISIBILITY OPTION

In times of poor visibility or if anxious about your route-finding abilities over moorland stay on the Granite Way. The site of Meldon Junction signal box is soon passed; signed paths to The Pump and Pedal (refreshments) and then Devon Cycle Hire (refreshments) are passed just before crossing the access lane to Prewley water treatment works on Prewley Moor. Eventually Sourton's church appears; bear right before Sourton Bridge to re-join the main route.

Turn right along the lane, which deteriorates to a stony track, ascending gently alongside a fantastic moss-covered granite wall for a while. The track ends at a gate onto open ground; the craggy outline of the Sourton Tors can be seen ahead. Keep straight on, soon passing through another gate, then continue along a broad grassy way between granite hedgebanks studded with gorse bushes. There are fantastic views towards 'the moor proper' and Dartmoor's highest ground: (from left to right) West Mill Tor, Yes Tor, Higher Willhays and Fordsland Ledge above the valley of the West Okement, with Shelstone Tor on the western side. The dark patch seen on the east side of the valley below Black Tor is Black-a-tor Copse, an area of ancient oak woodland.



*Sourton Tors*

Pass a wonderful line of beech trees then go through a gate; stay alongside the wall ahead. Where the wall bears away keep straight on to pass a granite gatepost.

**4** Turn immediately right alongside a dilapidated granite wall on a broad grassy way through the bracken.



## Sourton Ice Works

Just to the north of Sourton Tors, a short walk up from the single gatepost mentioned in the route description, are the remnants of Sourton Ice Works. In September 1874 James Henderson approached the Duchy of Cornwall with a view to leasing Sourton Hill for the purpose of collecting naturally produced ice throughout the winter months.

This spot was ideal as the railway station at Bridestowe provided access to both Plymouth and Exeter. To get the ice from the 'ponds' to the station would have involved carting the loads some 2½ miles down from the moor and along local roads. Plymouth had a thriving fish market, supplying by rail and sea the cities of London, Bath, Bristol and Manchester. In addition there were local markets in the Plymouth and Exeter areas.

Despite being initially successful, a combination of mild winters and competition from artificial ice producers in Plymouth resulted in the venture failing. In September 1886 the ponds were filled in, the fences taken down and presumably the machinery sold off.

*Please note that the route is not waymarked from this point until it reaches the path descending to Sourton Church.*

The path soon curves left along the contours; the wall drops away to the right. Keep on the main path, ignoring any crossing paths, across the lower slopes of the Sourton Tors. When level with the first of the outcrops on the ridge, at a broad and obvious path junction, bear right, downhill, to reach and walk parallel to a wall. Where the wall drops away sharply bear right, descending Sourton church of St Thomas à Becket. Pass through a gate and cross the Granite Way (the poor visibility option joins from the right). Head down past the church and the village hall. Bear left across the green, passing the parish noticeboard, to reach the main road (A386) in Sourton.



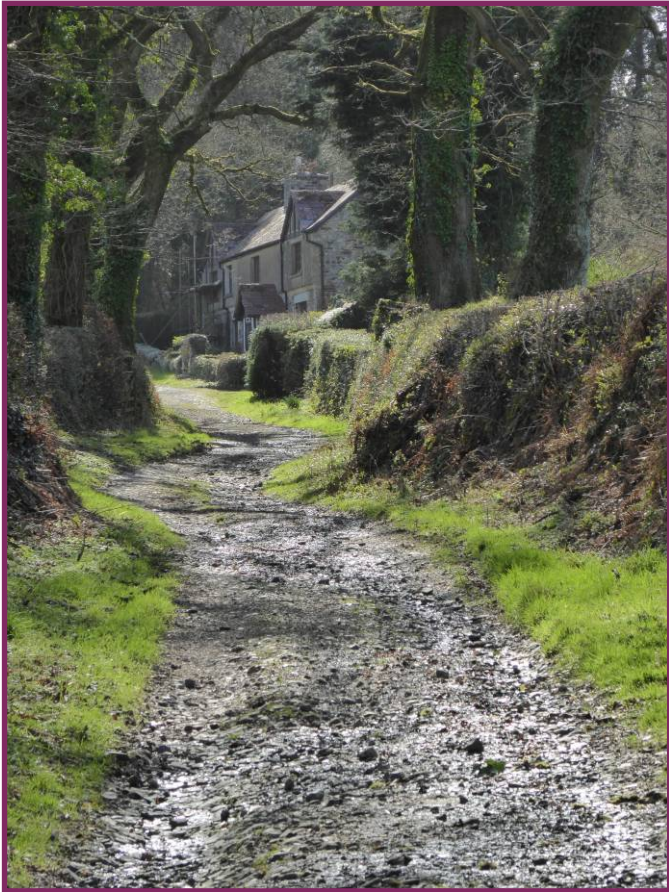
*The church of St Thomas à Becket, Sourton*

- 5** Turn left along the verge - there's a narrow path - then pick up the pavement. Pass the bus shelter. When level with a five-bar gate look across the road to spot a path sign just before a yellow house.
- 6** Cross the road with care and pass through a gateway; then turn right, through another gateway, on a damp path that passes behind the house to reach a gate into a field.

Keep along the right edge of two fields, with good views of the Sourton Tors. Pass through a gate by an open-fronted barn; head along the left edge of the next two fields, crossing streams and stiles. Head straight across the middle of the next field and through an open gateway, at which another stream is crossed. Keep straight on, passing a telegraph pole, and through another gateway/stile. Follow the left edge of three fields, crossing ladder stiles, then over one more to reach a lane at a bend.

- 7** Turn left, with views to Great Links Tor; at the next junction turn right, downhill, with views towards rooftops (and the [Bearslake Inn](#)) in the hamlet of Lake, with Lake Viaduct and the swell of Lake Down beyond.





*Near Lydford*

**8** A few paces down the lane turn right on a public byway, along a lovely hedged track. Descend to meet a ford on the Crandford Brook; keep ahead for a few paces then cross the stream on a small granite footbridge. Cross another stream on a granite bridge and head up the track, eventually reaching a road. Cross over and follow the track ahead. Where the track bears sharp right keep ahead through a gate to enter the open ground of Fernworthy Down. Follow the track along the lower edge; if it's muddy walkers can pick up drier ground above. The track heads downhill between banks of gorse to reach a track junction and ford. Cross the stream on a small granite bridge, then head up the track and through a gate.

About 75yd beyond the gate turn left on a byway that ascends through woodland, becoming increasingly wet and rocky. Meet a lane and turn left. Ascend over the brow of the hill; at the next junction bear left downhill to reach the war memorial at Rowell Cross in Lydford. Turn right and follow the lane down past the Nicholls Hall (there is access to the Saxon Town Banks on the right just past the hall) to reach the car park opposite the Castle Inn. **F**



*Lydford Castle*