

9. A Victorian Landscape Walk

Meldon Viaduct, to the west of Okehampton, is a superb example of Victorian engineering. Now a significant landscape feature, it was built to carry the old London and South Western Railway main line to Plymouth in the 1870s. Closed to trains in the 1960s, it is now available to walkers and cyclists on the Granite Way and offers superb views over the edge of Dartmoor. This walk starts at the Viaduct and includes several elements of Victorian interest on the northern edge of Dartmoor.

There is no direct road access to Meldon Viaduct (see Facts & Features). **From the Visitor Centre and Meldon Quarry Station go towards the Viaduct and then descend the steps to the left of the Viaduct, next to the fence.**

The Viaduct is one of only two in the country of this type of construction. Built in 1874 for the London and South Western Railway main line between Waterloo and Plymouth, it was widened to double track in 1879.

At the bottom cross the road and go down the track opposite, signed as a public bridlepath. Go through the gate at the end.

On the left here are the remains of a lime kiln. This probably pre-dates the Victorians. The burnt lime was used to fertilise the acidic soil.

Bear right onto a low embankment and continue ahead on this, over a stream by an old quarry building.

The long sinuous spoil heaps are a result of tipping from trucks from an old tramway. Most of the spoil came from a quarry which extracted limestone just across the river. To the left are the remains of another quarry. Opened by the Victorians in the 1880s, it operated until the 1970s, and extracted granulite, a form of granite. Used for roadstone it was also the basis for a short time of a glassmaking industry.

Keep on the obvious path through the spoil heaps to arrive at a footbridge over the West Okement river.

On the left just before the bridge is an old wheel pit. In Victorian times a waterwheel here drove pumps and machinery for the quarries.



Meldon Viaduct

Cross the bridge and turn left.

Just off the path to the right is the pit of the Victorian limestone quarry, now water filled and a distinctive green colour.

Having turned left after the bridge, follow the clear track.

Notice the old trial mine opening on the right and tramway remains on the left.

The track climbs steeply to a field. Bear left up and over the field then right, alongside a hedge to a gate which leads to a track. Pass through this.

Meldon Reservoir may be seen down to the left.

Cross the track and climb the path through the gate opposite. Keep climbing ahead next to the wall.

From the top there are views over the reservoir and Longstone Hill towards Yes Tor and High Willhayes, the highest points in England south of the Peak District.

Continue ahead parallel to the stone wall to the right.

The wall on the right marks the edge of mainly Victorian agricultural enclosures taken from the open moor.

Follow the path to the end of the stone wall, then bear right to meet another wall at a signpost. Turn left here to continue next to the wall, keeping it to your right (signed "To the Moor").

This is the route of the West Devon Way and the Two Castles Trail.



Sourton Church

Go through the gate onto the walled green lane.

This is the historic King Way, the old main road between Okehampton and Tavistock until the new roads were built (partly by the Victorians).

At the end of the lane go through a gap and then a gate and follow the wall on the left. Pass a small upright granite post and then head towards the prominent tor ahead. About 100m beyond the post, turn right along a grassy path; you should be in line with an obvious conical-shaped rock behind you. This path goes parallel to a stone wall over to the right.

The prominent crags to the left are Sourton Tors. Behind the tors was the Victorian experiment of the Sourton Ice Works, a series of artificial ponds to collect ice in winter for use by the Plymouth fish merchants. The scheme only lasted from 1875 to 1886 because of ice melting en route and a series of mild winters.

Keep to the obvious grassy path ahead until a major crossroads of paths is met. Bear right here, downhill, towards where the wall bears away; there are some white cottages in the valley below. This path descends through a shallow cutting.

As well as being used as access to the Ice Works, this path is also the line of a lychway, or corpse path, from the moor to Sourton church.

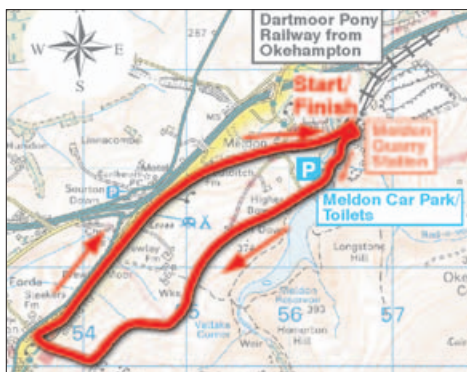
The track descends to Sourton.

Turn right by the church onto the cycleway, bearing left when it reaches the old railway.

The railway cycleway is a section of the Devon Coast to Coast route, part of the National Cycle Network and known as the Granite Way.

Continue along the old railway, crossing one main track with cycle gates.

Approaching Meldon Quarry, clearly visible ahead, a small area of picnic tables is passed on the left. This is the site of the junction of the



North Cornwall line, which went off along the small embankment back and to the left. This was the line taken by the Atlantic Coast Express trains from Waterloo to Bude and Padstow.

A little later the railway and cycleway arrives back at Meldon Viaduct. At the far side the walk returns to Meldon Quarry station.

Facts & Features

Walk length: 8km/5 miles. One steady climb. One short, sharp climb. No stiles.



Meldon is situated approximately 4km/2.5 miles west of Okehampton. There is no road access direct to the Viaduct. Dartmoor Pony railway from Okehampton Station operates daily in August, five days a week in June, July and September and at weekends from October to May. Call 01837 55637 for details. Ample car parking at Okehampton Station from where you can walk to Meldon, which may also be reached by train from Exeter on summer Sundays.

Car park: Meldon Reservoir.

Facilities: Meldon Viaduct (refreshments, toilets); Meldon Reservoir (toilets); Sourton (buses, pub). Okehampton Station has refreshments, toilets and information.

OS Maps:

- Explorer (1:25,000): No. 113 Okehampton
- No. OL28 Dartmoor
- Landranger (1:50,000): No. 191 Okehampton and North Dartmoor

For further information on the West Devon Way and Two Castles Trail, see page 7. To order information packs, see pages 32 and 33.