



Dartmoor

Fernworthy Reservoir



Basic hike: a circumnavigation of Fernworthy Reservoir.

Recommended map: Ordnance Survey OL 28 – but you don't really need it as there's a map on the interpretation board and walking around the lake is as obvious as a hike can get.

Distance and going: three and a half miles – very easygoing.

The Western Morning News reported how an ancient hump-backed bridge that is normally submerged by the waters of Fernworthy Reservoir was becoming quite a tourist destination. Visitors were following the old road out across the mud and sand to reach it.

The nearest water bird was a forlorn looking heron peering into the water several hundred yards away. I tell you all this because a walk around Fernworthy Reservoir is usually quite a different experience from the one we enjoyed and you will probably see a lot more water than displayed in our pictures.

To find the three-and-a-half-mile walk that circumnavigates the lake, you can either follow the brown road signs up into the hills from charming Chagford, or follow the signs from the Moretonhampstead-Princeton road. Either way is narrow and full of bends. But don't be put off – Fernworthy is a wonderful place to visit – both in a watery and an arboreal sense. There's a visitor car park and a scenic picnic area for those who simply wish to stop and admire the reservoir and the magnificent forests – or there's a choice of hikes for those who fancy some exercise. The round-the-lake walk is probably easiest and most desirable.

There seems little point in telling you where to go: a) because a large illustrated map adorns the interpretation board

by the car park, and b) because the route around the lake is obvious. The only difficult thing is making up your mind as to whether you should walk clockwise or anti-clockwise.

Having looked at Fernworthy on the map, you could assume that the walk would be an unbroken belt of dark conifers. You'd be wrong. After a brief walk through the dark trees you soon find yourself on the other side of the gloom and walking across what used to be ancient fields belonging to the three farms that once made a living up here.

Indigenous scrub trees line the way and looked most colourful on the autumn day when we did the walk.

It was at this point that we could see the aforementioned bridge. It was part of a Dartmoor lane until 1942 when Torbay council built Fernworthy Reservoir. There's a plaque by the dam which tells you all about the wartime opening ceremony.

We walked down to the humpback bridge and took our photos for the WMN newsdesk and retreated to the woods again. Here we found ourselves on a boardwalk that skirts through the trees to the western end of the forest. The wooden way eventually ends in moorland – and now we were on the western shore of the lake. As the reservoir narrows towards the dam you can look across at the remains of a Bronze Age hut encampment on the far bank. Eventually the path descends under the dry side of the dam. Unlike some of the region's larger reservoirs, Fernworthy doesn't have a dam that you can cross.

The path winds its way down through a jungle of rhododendron before crossing the river and climbing sharply up the other side. Here we turn right and walk a quarter of a mile or so to regain the car park.

What more could you ask for? A lakeside walk complete with forests and moorland views - plus the novelty of historic sights you may never see again.