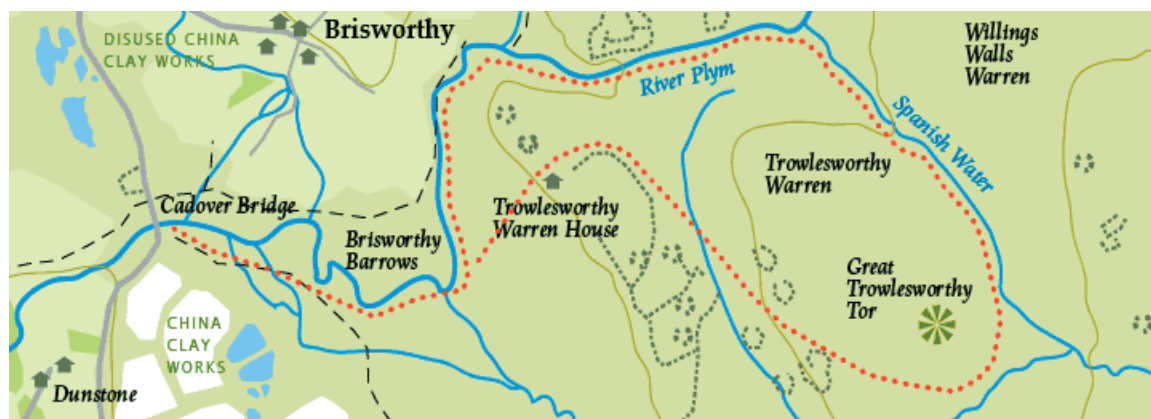




South Dartmoor

Trowlesworthy Common



Here's a walk that will take you into some of the most open wilderness areas in the south west, and yet the area is less than half a dozen miles from the centre of Plymouth, the region's biggest city.

Indeed, much of the walk escorts the stream that gives the city its name. The River Plym rises in the heart-lands of south-western Dartmoor, and the 3,300 acre Trust-owned property at Trowlesworthy Warren stretches from the edges of the moorland to the source of the stream.

The area of Dartmoor verging on the northerly limits of Plymouth is remarkable for its extraordinary range of stone remains, many dating back some 2,500 years. Stone rows and circles can be seen, as can the low remains of prehistoric settlements. But the landscape is not all primeval - at Trowlesworthy Warren the terrain is covered by the pillow mounds which were once burrows where rabbits were bred for meat and fur.

The moorland is almost entirely open access land so you can wander wherever you wish, but this particular route will introduce you to the wide lonely spaces of Dartmoor and take you up to the Tors for breathtaking views of Plymouth and the South Devon Coast.

To find the beginning of the walk go to Cadover Bridge on the moor-hugging road that wends its ways from Ivybridge to Yelverton. A paved road (not marked on the OS map) appears to run into the moors and, after following it a few hundred metres, you'll notice a track that meanders east alongside the Plym. In summer this is a popular haunt for picnicking Plymouthians.

Basic hike: From the banks of the Plym near Cadover Bridge, upriver to Ditsworthy Weir, then along the Lee Moor Leat to Spanish Lake and up to Great Trowlesworthy Tor - returning via Trowlesworthy Warren Farm.

Recommended map: Ordnance Survey OL 28 - Dartmoor.

Distance and going: three-and-a-half miles, easy going but maybe boggy in places.

Getting there: take the road from Ivybridge to Yelverton. Having passed Lee Moor China Clay Works proceed north along the road to Cadover Bridge.

At a wide space near the bend where the Blacka Brook stream descends to join the Plym there's plenty of space to park. The warren rises gently to the west in an almost featureless plain until it meets Little Trowlesworthy and, further beyond, Great Trowlesworthy Tors.

Our route follows the track along the Plym towards Trowlesworthy Warren Farm. After a few hundred metres the track swings right towards the farm buildings, but we strike off to north and continue following the river. Soon there's a turn to the east - as you walk along the side of the stream look out for the extensive pillow mounds just to the north under Legis Tor. These were man-made warrens which once dominated the landscape around here.

Rabbits were bred for meat and fur on Southern Dartmoor from Medieval times up until the 1950's. The banks of stone and soil provided ideal breeding conditions for the rabbits.

Walkers may also spot 'vermin traps', designed to catch pests like rats, weasels and stoats. The low walls would encourage vermin to forage ever closer to the centre where slate shutters set around stone traps would be operated by the animals tripping mechanisms of levers and string.

At a place where another stream, strangely named Spanish Lake, enters the river from the east, the valley of the Plym swings north again. Our route continues alongside it for another mile or so. Eventually we come to Ditsworthy Weir situated between Eastern Tor and Shavercombe Tor. This introduces the walker to an extraordinary man-made waterway known as the Lee Moor Leat. It was originally built to provide power for a tin mine at Bottle Hill, but was later adapted for use in the china-clay quarries.

Our route follows this leat, doubling back on our previous course, albeit higher up the hill. We're now heading south to Spanish Lake once again. Having reached the stream, leave the leat (which swings away to the west following the contours of the hill in a big curve) and head directly up the moor to Great Trowlesworthy Tor, which is the left hand rock stack you'll see directly to the south.

This is a good place to see moorland birds like skylarks, meadow pipits, wheatears and stone chats.

On top of the tor you will be treated to huge vistas, both towards Plymouth and the sea, and into the great southern hinterlands of central Dartmoor. But most apparent of all are the massive china clay workings which dominate the scene to the south. Man-made lakes glint in the sun and the general whiteness of the great scars gave rise to that inevitable phrase - lunar landscape.

Now turn to the west and walk the three or four hundred metres to Little Trowlesworthy Tor. On the way you will come across a curious lump of rock - a massive cylindrical piece of granite which lies at a jaunty angle as if someone once tried to move it and had then given up. Which is exactly what happened.

Quarrymen cut and shaped the rock in the quarry at the lower tor back in the early 1800's when Plymouth and Devon-

port were separate places. The two towns were forever vying to out-do each other in those days, and this huge cylinder was intended to be the base for an enormous flagpole that would dominate the centre of Devonport. There are two arguments as to why it never reached town - one is that the mean spirited burghers failed to collect the necessary funds - the other is that it was simply too heavy to move.

Now it's simply a matter of walking back down towards Trowlesworthy Warren Farm which you will see some half-a-mile down from the tor. From there, rejoin the track and follow it back to the car park.