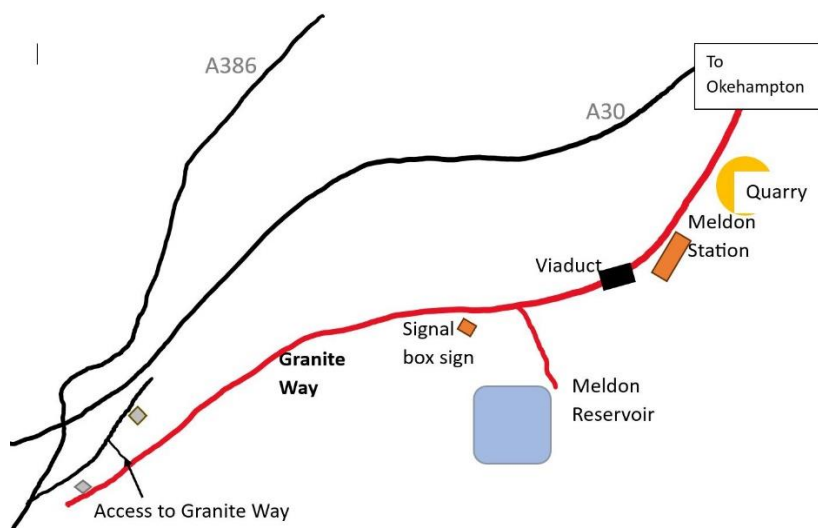


Sourton Down to Meldon Quarry along the Granite Way – an accessible walk

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This is an excellent walk at all times of the year. The surface is good and the main route is flat though the diversion to Meldon reservoir dam does have a hill. It is suitable for those with mobility issues, people pushing prams and pushchairs, and for wheelchairs and mobility scooters. Disabled Ramblers would classify the main route as Category 1, though the extension would be Category 2/3. It has been tested by the Wheeled Access Group on several occasions.



The main walk is 1.8 miles in each direction, the extension to Meldon Dam and reservoir adds 1.0 mile to your walk, and if you would like to walk on to Okehampton station which reopened to trains in 2021 it is an extra 2 miles in each direction. Okehampton station has trains to Exeter and bus links across Devon. You can also extend the walk south towards Lydford along the Granite Way and there are several walks for the fit and able bodied from Meldon reservoir.

Park on the road between Devon Cycle Hire SX254913 and the Pump and Pedal bike shop and café SX254652 at Sourton Down (EX20 4HS). There is a finger post showing the path to the Granite Way. Once you are on the Granite Way turn left (north).

The Granite Way is an 11 mile trail between Okehampton and Lydford and is part of the Devon Coast to Coast cycleway. This part of the Granite Way was originally built by the London and South Western Railway linking Okehampton and Plymouth via Lydford. The first trains reached Plymouth in 1876 but the line was closed in 1968 as part of the Beeching cuts. Between these dates it had a varied list of owners and services. Part of it continued to be used for moving quarry stone until 2011.

As you walk along the track you first go through a steep sided cutting with mosses and ferns clinging to the wet walls. It then opens out to views across the highest parts of Dartmoor to your right (east) and rolling countryside to the west.



Before the viaduct there is a sign for the Meldon signal box with photos of the original building. It controlled the junction where the line for Plymouth split from the now dismantled branch line to North Cornwall. This line was closed in 1966.

Shortly after the signal box you arrive at the Meldon Viaduct, a spectacular feat of engineering. It was built in 1874 with a span of 165m and is 45m above the valley floor. It crosses the steep valley of the West Okemont river. It was built with wrought iron lattice piers, and is one of only 2 remaining railway bridges in the UK using this form of construction. It may have been built in this way to reduce resistance to the high winds which blow up the valley. Originally it was built for a single track railway, but in 1878 a second bridge was built alongside

using welded steel piers and the 2 bridges were linked together. During the 20th century it was further strengthened. Although the passenger railway line finished in 1968 the bridge

continued to be used by the quarry for shunting trains until the 1990s.



If you look up the valley you can see Meldon Dam and for much of the year water is spilling over. Beyond that are the hills of Dartmoor including Corn Ridge and Branscombe's Loaf. Below are the remains of limestone quarrying, including Meldon Pool, kilns and waste banks. Limestone was quarried from 1790 until the 1880s, initially on the east bank of the

West Okemont river and then on the west bank. It was used for building and was also put on agricultural fields. The limestone was formed 335 million years ago underneath the sea, before the formation of the granite.

In 1889 apalite deposits were found which were used in glass making for bottles. Apalite was formed from liquid chemicals released when the granite of Dartmoor was still molten. It is a finely grained granite like rock. The glassworks was only in production for a short while in the 1920s. The apalite quarry is a small quarry adjacent to the large aggregate quarry.



Continue across the viaduct and on your right at the north end there is a steep and rough track which leads down to the valley and on to the reservoir.

Meldon Station is the highest part of the railway line, 290m above sea level. It was built for use by the staff of the quarry in the 1920s. It continued to be used by the quarry after the passenger line was closed. A new station and platform was opened in 2000 as part of the Heritage Railway and

you can still see the signs from this enterprise but it was closed again in 2019.



The main quarry you can see was developed from 1897 to supply track ballast and other stone products for the London and South Western Railway (LSWR). The granite and Hornfels ballast were considered to be superior to any other ballast in the LSWR region. It was privatised in 1994 but was mothballed in 2011. It now appears to be a derelict industrial site but the whole area has become a Geological Site of Special Scientific Interest.

If you do not want to continue to Okehampton station you should turn round at this point and go back over the viaduct.

As you return, 0.4 of a mile from the viaduct is a turning on your left which takes you to Meldon Reservoir. This extension to the route is 0.5 miles in each direction. You go down a short steep descent, across a road then follow a minor road up and then down a hill to the reservoir. Although the surface is tarmac the steepness of the route may not be suitable for some wheelchairs. You can go across the dam with wonderful views along the reservoir to the hills of Dartmoor and looking over the dam to the other side you get an excellent view of the West Okemont valley and the viaduct.



The reservoir was formed by damming the West Okement River. It is about 1.2 km long and 300 metres wide. The dam was built using aggregates from the quarry and is 200m long and 55.2 m high. It was opened in 1974.

Return to the Granite Way and make your way back to your starting point. If you would like any further information about the Wheeled Access Group please visit www.dartmoorwags.org.uk
