

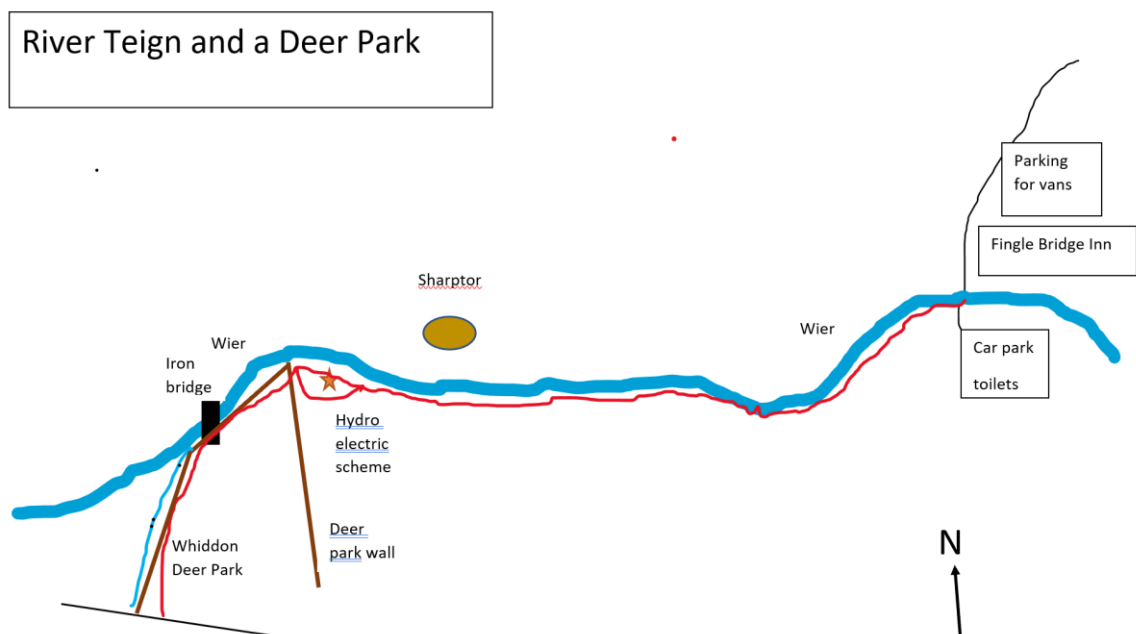
## River Teign and a Deer Park, an accessible walk from Fingle Bridge

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This route has been tested and tested by the Wheeled Access Group, members of which use a range of mobility scooter types providing different access capabilities. It has important memories for the WAGs because it was our first walk after lockdown.

The River Teign and Deer Park walk from Fingle Bridge is an out and back route suitable for people using mobility scooters, for people not wanting to climb walls or stiles or pushing a pram or pushchair. The route has some hills and is rough in places so not suitable for manual wheelchairs.

This walk is lovely at all times of year. In the winter you can see through the trees to the river and the steep sides of the gorge. As Spring comes there are wonderful flowers including bluebells, as well as views to the river. As Summer progresses you get glimpses of the river through the tree canopy. In Autumn the colours of the leaves add to the views of the river and gorge.



You can park on the north side of the river just before the Fingle Bridge Inn or cross the narrow bridge to the car park. The north side is better for vans. There are accessible toilets in the main car park on the south side of the narrow bridge.

The walk begins at the centre of the bridge. It is possible that the original bridge was made of wood and was replaced by the current granite bridge at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Some lime mortar has been found in the current bridge that suggests 14<sup>th</sup> century construction but there is little other evidence to support this theory. The purpose of the granite bridge was to service the industries of Fingle Gorge. These included corn milling, charcoal burning, bark ripping and timber. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the gorge was not the peaceful place it is today.

The River Teign is 31 miles long, rising on Dartmoor and reaching the sea at Teignmouth. It is famous for its Salmon and Brown Trout which can be seen jumping the weirs along this walk. The best time to see this sight is in September and October, after heavy rain. There are also many birds along the river including Kingfisher, Grey Wagtail and Dippers.

Cross the river on the narrow bridge heading south from the pub and turn right, following the river upstream. After about 200m there is a track to the right that takes you down to the river. You can follow this track along the river for a short distance, but it is not possible for anyone using wheels to continue far. You will need to turn around and return to the main path. You will then (0.4km from bridge) see the first of the weirs.

Continue along the path. You will go up a hill and down the other side. There are some lovely beech trees along the river with polypody ferns growing along the branches. At about 1.9km from the bridge there are excellent views to gorge on the other side including to Sharptor.

After 2.2km the path splits. The path to the right goes down to the hydroelectric plant. This is well worth a visit, but it is quite steep going down to the plant and up the other side. If you need to avoid the steep path carry on to the left and the paths will re-join shortly.

Work began on the hydroelectric plant in 1927 although plans for it had begun in 1916. Sir Edward Lutyens designed the building to provide electricity for Castle Drogo which had 332 electrical plug sockets to power the many modern gadgets in the castle. The turbines were producing electricity by 1929. In 2017 the National Trust recommissioned the turbines and electricity generated is now used by the Castle Drogo visitor centre with any excess power used to heat one of the boilers in the biomass house. There is no wasted power. You can see the turbine house and the pipes from the path.

Follow the path uphill from the hydroelectric plant and you will re-join the main path. Shortly after this you go through a gate and into Whiddon Deer Park. Here you can see the walls that were built to keep deer in the park and to keep the local people out. They are up to 10 feet high and made from large granite blocks. A wall climbs dramatically up the hill to your left while the path follows the wall on your right. The walls today have a wonderful collection of mosses and lichens growing on them.



If you keep an eye on the river you will soon see Drogo weir. It was built in 1928 to serve the hydro plant, designed to ensure the salmon could pass the hydro plant. Today you can still see Salmon pass the weir.

The iron bridge across the river will take those of you with full mobility either towards Castle Drogo or back along the north side of the river but before you do this, continue on your current path into Whiddon Deer Park. The path moves away from the River Teign following a small stream and the Deer Park wall.



The Deer Park was enclosed around 1560 by Sir John Whyddon who owned the adjacent Whyddon (Whiddon) House to contain a herd of fallow deer. It was a symbol of high status because only the King could grant permission to keep deer. The Park itself is now a SSSI managed by the National Trust and is a magical ancient landscape with hollowed out crab trees, magnificent beech trees and old oak trees. In spring it is carpeted by bluebells.

The walk up until this stage is through the trees, so on reaching the park you are out into daylight and on a sunny day into a much warmer part of the walk. Don't miss a lovely little bridge that crosses the stream and a mysterious little building close by.

There are several great picnic spots along here as you go through the deer park. Once you reach the road (3.6km from the bridge) it's time to turn round and retrace your steps. As you walk back through the Deer Park, look up and you will see Castle Drogo high on the hill above you. Castle Drogo is a grade 1 listed building. It is the last castle to be built in England, built between 1911 and 1930.



As you return to the car park enjoy the views across the gorge and have a look for the mosses and lichens which love this damp environment.