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Brent Moor and Avon Dam

Starting point and OS Grid reference	Car park at Shipley Bridge (SX 681629)
Ordnance Survey map	OL28 - Dartmoor
Distance	7.2 miles
Date of Walk	25 June 2019
Traffic light rating	

Introduction: This walk to the Avon Dam and Brent Moor is a walk of distinct contrasts. The approach to the dam is very pretty, alongside the River Avon with attractive waterfalls and a profusion of rhododendrons, which, although in these quantities are probably regarded as a weed, they are nevertheless attractive when in flower. Above the dam, the landscape then becomes bleak and bare and you get a real sense of solitude and quiet.

The Avon Dam was completed in 1957 and built to provide drinking water to local towns. It is popular for brown trout fishing.

The route briefly interacts with the Abbott's Way. There is a long legend story behind this but the bottom line is that to avoid people getting lost crossing the moor, a line of crosses was erected to guide them. We come across one, namely Huntingdon Cross, which dates from medieval times.

After crossing an ancient clapper bridge, the walk climbs to join the course of the former Zeal Tor Tramway. This was only in use for a brief spell from 1847 to 1850 and was used to carry peat from Red Lake Mire to a naphtha works at Shipley Bridge. Naphtha was used at that time as fuel for oil lamps used by miners, tunnellers etc. The tramway consisted of rails bolted to granite blocks, some of which still line the route.

As you join the tramway, to the North West is a strange dark conical hill in the distance. This is the spoil heap from the Red Lake china clay works which was abandoned in 1933.

The walk is not difficult but clear paths do not always appear where the maps suggest. This is Access land, so people are free to wander. There is a relatively steep section climbing to the old tramway, hence the amber traffic light. For this section too, it is strongly recommended that you carry a compass, in the event that mist descends. As long as you head south west, you are certain to hit the tramway section at some point which is obvious on the ground.

The walk starts from the Shipley Bridge car park. To get there; follow the signs for Avon Dam from South Brent. When you see signs for Shipley Bridge, follow them.

Start: From the car park (SX 681629), take the path alongside the public toilets. This quickly joins the access track to the dam where you turn left to follow it, alongside a pretty cascade.

Follow the tarmac for a mile and a half then turn right turn right up a stony track, leaving the tarmac (SX 682647). The path climbs moderately steeply to the dam. On the way, you pass the remains of ancient settlements though these are not easy to spot.

You arrive at the dam at the eastern end of the dam wall. You soon cross what look like a line of trig. points (SX 680653) but these obviously had another purpose, connected with the reservoir.

Follow the edge of the water on the clear path until you reach a stream entering it (SX 679655). On the map, the path/bridleway follows the stream for a short distance before turning left over it but on the day, I had little difficulty crossing the stream via some rocks, close to where it enters the reservoir, to follow the path opposite. This is reflected in the .gpx route and shown as a dotted grey line on the 1:25000 OS map.

Join a broad track (SX 671659) (obviously the one coming from the higher stream crossing point mentioned earlier) and turn left.

Stay on this track, which more or less follows the course of another feeder stream.

Cross another stream via the Western Wella Brook single stone block bridge. A brass plaque tells you this was erected in 2018. Cross a stile. Huntingdon Cross is here (SX 664662), just to the right of the stile and not easy to spot at first against the wall. The map does show the bridleway crossing the stream here via a ford but "foot passengers" need to follow the stream for a further half mile to cross by way of a clapper bridge (SX 657662) – or get wet!

Once over the stream, turn left for about two hundred yards alongside the stream before turning right (south) then, after a further hundred and fifty yards, turning south west. (Note - I was not seeking to take the very straight footpath shown on the map which passes White Barrows, which was not clear on the ground anyway.)

The path, which could just be made out on the ground climbs quite steeply. It was not exactly as the bridleway shown on the map. I took the line of least resistance!.

The route eventually starts to go up the right hand side of a small valley, as it curves gently right. It then cuts left, across the top of the valley

Arrive on the ridge at the remains of the old tramway at SX 651657, just to the left of an old stone building. Turn left to follow it. The tramway is very clear on the ground for most of its length and is easy to follow.

After three hundred yards or so, the remains of St Petre's Cross appear on the left, a somewhat sad stump on the summit cairn (SX 654655). A crude shelter has been created from the rocks.

There is a fork in the track/tramway at SX 655651. Keep left.

At SX 664647 pass an old distance marker with “¾” written on it, presumably distance marker for the old tramway.

The tramway route is mostly clear on the ground. Here and there are lines of granite blocks along it but it becomes a little less distinct as you get to the flat dome of Brent Moor. However it is reasonably easy to pick it out.

The route curves gradually right of the summit. It then drops down off Brent Moor to meet a stone wall (SX 676631). Continue descending with the wall on your right, above the Avon Filtration System buildings.

Emerge at a tarmac drive, to the left of a cattle grid and turn left. Follow the tarmac down to join the track from your outward journey. Turn right back to the car park.

