

This walk description is from happyhiker.co.uk

South Zeal to Cosdon Hill (Dartmoor)

Starting point and OS Grid reference	South Zeal village (SX 652934) – free car park by the sports field.
Ordnance Survey map	Ordnance Survey OL 28 - Dartmoor
Distance	7.1 miles
Traffic light rating	

Introduction: This Dartmoor walk from South Zeal to Cosdon Hill provides an opportunity to examine some of the relics left by our Iron Age ancestors, primarily a virtually complete stone circle and an ancient settlement. Often when these ancient settlements are shown on maps, it is difficult for the uninitiated to see very much but the evidence is pretty clear here. The views from the top of Cosdon Hill are great and there are a number of interesting looking tors around.

Although I set out to follow marked footpaths/bridleways, because this is Open Access Land and moorland, routes are not always exactly as shown on the maps but tend to be where most people have wandered, so the GPS route I have provided is based on the recorded track of where I actually walked.

The walk starts from a free car park by the sports field in the very attractive village of South Zeal. To get there, take the B3260 east from Oakhampton. The car park is only signed to be noticed by the approach from the Oakhampton end. If you come the other way, you will miss it. Drive through the village past the small church and stone cross in the village centre. When the road levels out, look out for the standard “P” sign on the right, on the side of a house. Turn right here then right again into the car park.

Start: Leave the car park and turn right to walk up the lane. At the fork turn right and walk to the main road. Cross straight over and up the broad track opposite. The track bends to the left passing Cawsand House. Also pass a house “Hillstead” and “Beacon Cottage”. A finger post will point you to “The Moor”, although its precise direction is a little off.

Stay on the main track and at a ‘T’ junction of broad tracks which are public bridleways, turn left. The track has been a mixture of concrete and tarmac sections until now but it is now a stony walled track.

At SX 639930, the stony track enters open moorland. Continue to follow the track.

After 50 yards or so, the track forks. Keep right. At the next fork, go left, gradually working away from the wall on the right. Go left again at the next fork.

It is now difficult to describe the precise route as there are few landmarks. The track degenerates into more of a simple moorland path and becomes indistinct in places. To begin with, you head in the direction of Belstone Tor, the hill with the rocky outcrop, across the valley in front of you.

You come to a little stream which you have to ford as best you can (very shallow when I crossed). Shortly after the stream, the path curves left round the base of Cosdon Hill and you start to run parallel with the Belstone Tor ridge.

At SX 628917 the path forks. Go left. There is no landmark here except to point out that you are following the right hand edge of a large, slightly lower area of land.

About half a mile further on, as you begin to approach the valley of Small Brook, the path forks. Take the left fork. You now walk through the remains of an Iron Age settlement. Although at first glance, it just looks like a mass of stones, if you look closely, there are too many which are standing upright, in a way which would not occur naturally and you should be able to pick out several circles of stones which were the sites of the residents' huts. I actually found one with a couple of layers of stones at one point, laid like bricks with one stone bridging the gap between the stones beneath.

The path goes through the settlement and follows the direction of Small Brook though never gets closer to it than 3/400 feet and gradually climbs the hill to a grassy ridge.

As you get to the top of the ridge at Little Hound Tor, the stone circle comes into view (SX 633896). Cross a broader path to view it. 150 to 200 yards south east of the stone circle is White Moor Stone (SX 634895) which identifies a junction of parish boundaries. There are other boundary stones and you can see one in the distance north east of White Moor Stone.

Return to the broad path by the stone circle and turn right to follow the ridge to Cosdon Hill. The OS map shows the location of the trig. point as "Cosdon Beacon" and it is obvious that because of the superb 360° view, it would have made an ideal spot for a beacon. There is quite a large stone cairn there too but it looks as though this and the trig. point sit on top of a much larger mound, which is probably some much more ancient structure. This looks to have been "robbed" for the stone to make the cairn and the crude shelter on the east side.

From the trig. point (SX 636915), continue in the direction in which you approached it, on the clear path (20° magnetic). There is another smaller cairn marking the path, just before it dips over the edge of the hill.

As you descend, the path becomes faint and uncertain. This is Access Land and people have obviously wandered. I simply made my way downhill, following tracks here and there (some might have been sheep tracks) heading roughly for a point midway between the villages of Sticklepath and South Zeal ahead. I reached a small

line of trees by a stream, leading to the corner of a stone wall. Crossing the stream and keeping to the left of the wall corner dropped me down to the stony track used for the outward journey. A right turn and it was a simple case of retracing my steps to South Zeal.

In practice, whichever way you come down Cosdon Hill (as long as it is in a northerly direction!), you will eventually cross the broader track you used on the outward journey.

