

DARTMOOR

Touring the Tors on a wild camping adventure

Overview

Often described as 'the last wilderness in England', Dartmoor's landscape is quite unlike any other: rolling hills topped with strangely sculpted granite tors, heather-clad moors, wetlands and deep wooded valleys with fast-flowing rivers. It is also one of the richest areas in the world for prehistoric archaeology: the moor is studded with evidence of the Bronze Age with hut circles, standing stones, stone circles, stone rows and burial kists (chambers). The national park (sections of it, anyway – see www.dartmoor.gov.uk for a map of exactly where) is also the only place in England where you can legally wild camp.

Of all the places on Dartmoor, perhaps the northern area of the Okehampton Range feels the most wild and untouched, since it is uninhabited and used by the MOD for training exercises. This run takes in those dramatic landscapes with a relatively short, exhilarating circuit and an overnight wild camp.

Between Dinger Tor and Oke Tor the route passes close to several streams, offering a choice of camping spots.

Highlights

- A wild camping micro-adventure that can be squeezed into 24 hours or less
- Great running using good tracks and paths between tors, with fantastic ridge sections
- The two highest points in Southern England, Yes Tor and High Willhays
- Wonderful, wild and remote scenery of rugged tors and quiet wooded valleys
- Expansive views over Dartmoor
- Visible archaeology including the Nine Maidens stone circle
- Superb night skies over the national park

Top tips

- This run is within the Okehampton Range, which is used by the British Army for exercises. Red flags are raised around the perimeter when live firing is due to take place. You should always check dates for safe access (see below). On most weekends and over the summer it is generally accessible to the public.
- If you see any unexploded ordnance or other military debris, do not touch it. Note its location and inform the police.
- Wild camping is permitted on much of Dartmoor, but you should check your chosen location (see below).
- Though paths may not be marked, you will find paths exist between many of the tors.
- Although not mountainous, running on Dartmoor can be slower than expected and has its own hazards: watch out for boggy areas, peat hags, heather and ankle-turning tussocky grass.
- Care should be taken running around the tors since there are large areas of boulders and stones strewn on the slopes (clitter).

Further information

- MOD live-firing times on Dartmoor can be found at www.gov.uk (search 'Dartmoor firing times')
- Permitted wild camping locations can be found at www.dartmoor.gov.uk

Start/Finish: Belstone

Duration: Total running time is approximately 3–4 hrs but the route is broken up with an overnight wild camp halfway around. A recommended itinerary is an afternoon run to an overnight camp with a run back to the start the next morning. The total trip takes 24 hours or less.

Total Distance: 15km (9 miles)

Total height gain/loss: 380m (1240ft)

High Point: High Willhays 621m (2037ft)

Terrain: Very runnable route on good paths over ridges; includes moorland with boggy areas; some areas of granite clitter (care needed here); a small trackless section over marshy ground, and unmetalled vehicle tracks.

Maps: OS Explorer OL28 Dartmoor or Landranger 191 Okehampton & North Dartmoor

Navigation: Easy in good conditions; navigational skills needed in poor weather.

Where to stay: Wild camping – good spots are around the head of the East Okemont river (near SX 604 887) or by the river below Steeperton Tor (near SX 615 888). You could also deviate from the route and head down to the West Okemont river and camp by Sandy Ford (SX 575 879).

Supplies: None on the route – carry your own. Refreshments: tearoom and pub in Belstone.

The route

From Belstone a short section of the Tarka Trail leads you to Scarey Tor then past the Cullever Steps (stepping stones) up to Rowtor, which is followed by West Mill Tor. From here it's a short descent then climb to Yes Tor, on to High Willhays, and a trackless section to Dinger Tor before joining good tracks through the valley around the head of East Okemont river where you can break the journey and camp. (Alternatively good wild camping spots with water sources can be found at Sandy Ford and below Steeperton Tor.)

From the head of the east Okemont river, the route climbs towards Steeperton Tor, turning off onto a ridge that runs over Oke Tor, Higher Tor and Belstone Tor, before dropping over Belstone Common and back to the start.

