

AVON CALLING!

Although only a few miles from the A38, this surfaced walk from Shipley Bridge to the dramatic Avon Dam Reservoir takes you out into open moorland and gives you a real taste of the south moor. It is a great route to explore if you fancy a gentle stroll or have young children, but do bear in mind that sections are quite exposed if the weather is bad.

Start from the main car park at Shipley Bridge but take a moment to look at the remains of the 19th century naphtha works along the west side before you set off. Naphtha was a substance distilled from peat and used in candles and mothballs. The structure was subsequently used as a clay settling plant.

Head north past the toilet block along a narrow surfaced path to join the bridleway along the service road to the reservoir. This 'road' is only open to authorised vehicles so you shouldn't be disturbed by any traffic. However, being surfaced it makes an ideal route for wheelchairs and cycles. Turn left and follow the bridleway as it heads north alongside the River Avon. In summer there are great slabs of granite exposed along the water's edge, which make great sunbathing spots, but in autumn and winter these are often covered by swirling peaty water after heavy rain.

When the road divides after a short distance keep right alongside the river following the curves and meanders deeper and deeper into the moor. After you pass beside a metal gate look out for the remains of Brent Moor House on your left. Once variously a farm with an orchard across the river and a hunting lodge, it became a holiday home between the wars and then a Youth Hostel but was

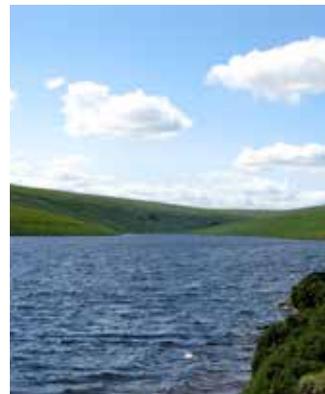


The walk up from Shipley bridge is a family favourite

blown up in 1968 because it was in such poor repair. Legend has it that when it was standing the house was haunted by the ghost of a nanny who had smothered a baby and then drowned herself in the waters of the Avon.

As you continue northwards the valley still feels quite closed in and hidden for some stretches, then as you cross a

bridge and approach the dam it opens out to give clear views up to Brent Moor and Zeal Plains on your left and Dockwell Ridge and Smallbrook Plains on your right. Not far from the dam you will see the remains of a Bronze Age settlement, Ryder's Rings, on the opposite side of the river. The construction of this great double pound reflects



the type of granite found in this area, mainly small blocks and slabs. There are no large set-stones in the walls of the hut circles, which have consequently collapsed into piles. Shortly after Ryder's Rings the path splits.

The easier route continues along the surfaced road to the base of the dam while a rougher route leads more steeply uphill to the reservoir itself. The dam was completed in 1957 and the reservoir now covers 50 acres. Environment Agency rod licence holders may fish for natural brown trout free of charge at this reservoir from 15 March - 12 October.

To return to the car park simply retrace your steps downhill all the way. Although this is a linear walk the views are stunningly different in each direction and there is plenty to see from gnarled old trees alongside the path to buzzards and ravens overhead. ■





The views unfold the closer you get to the Dam



How to get there

The Avon Dam Walk is situated on the south side of the National Park, 5 miles from South Brent and within easy access of the A38.

Leave the A38 at Marley Head.

At the first roundabout take the first exit towards South Brent. At the second roundabout take the second exit towards Avon Dam and continue to follow the signs for Avon Dam (straight across at first cross roads, bear left at next junction and right at the following one to reach the main car park at Shipley Bridge).

- A** Park in the main car park and take a moment to look at the naptha works before you follow the narrow path past the toilet block.
- B** Keep right alongside the river and look out for the great slabs of granite stretching into the water.
- C** Pass the ruins of Brent Moor House on your left.
- D** Look out across the river for a view of the remains of the Bronze Age settlement known as Ryder's Rings.

FOOT FILE

LENGTH: 5 mile trip there and back.
SURFACE: Tarmac.
ACCESS: A steady continuous climb alongside the River Avon (but downhill all the way back of course!)
STATUS: The route follows a bridleway so it is open to horse riders and cyclists as well as walkers.
FACILITIES: Free parking with disabled parking bays, public toilets (including disabled and baby changing). Please bear in mind that this car park can be very busy at peak times.

MORE INFO

For more information on this and other reservoir sites contact South West Lakes Trust:
www.swlakestrust.org.uk

For more detailed access information on this route and other similar routes see *Easy-Going Dartmoor* on the Dartmoor National Park website:
www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk

To download this route online visit dartmoor.co.uk