

POTTER'S WALK

Gazing across Fernworthy Reservoir to Thornworthy Tor with the sun low in the sky and a gaggle of Canada Geese coasting nearby, I can't think of a better place on Dartmoor than Potters Walk for a gentle stroll or for exploring with young children

Built in 1993, this *BT Countryside for All* award winning short circular walk was named after Sydney Potter who lived and worked at Fernworthy for over 50 years. The land around bears the marks of many earlier settlers as well.

Start out from the main reservoir car park and picnic site – a gentle grassy slope with a scattering of picnic benches. This makes a great base for any family members not inclined to walk. The route heads out along a well-surfaced path

beside the water to the historic Fernworthy Dam. On the right before the dam are hut circles that have been dated back to 2000 BC. If water levels are low, more hut circles and ancient boundary walls appear out of the mud on the reservoir edge along with the old road and its bridge that lead the way to the cold comfort of Teign Head Farm out on the high North Moor.

The impressive structure of Fernworthy Dam was constructed between 1936 and 1942 and looking at it today you would never guess that it

was made of concrete and only faced with granite quarried from the site. There are tales from the builders that the wooden launders that carried the South Teign over the construction site would thump and shake in the autumn months as salmon and seat trout fought their way upstream to old spawning sites.

Although there is no public access across the dam and the longer reservoir walk drops down into the valley to cross a small bridge below, Canada Geese can often be seen braced against the water flowing over

the spill way. Fernworthy is also popular with a range of other birds including mallard, grebe, coot, cormorant and heron.

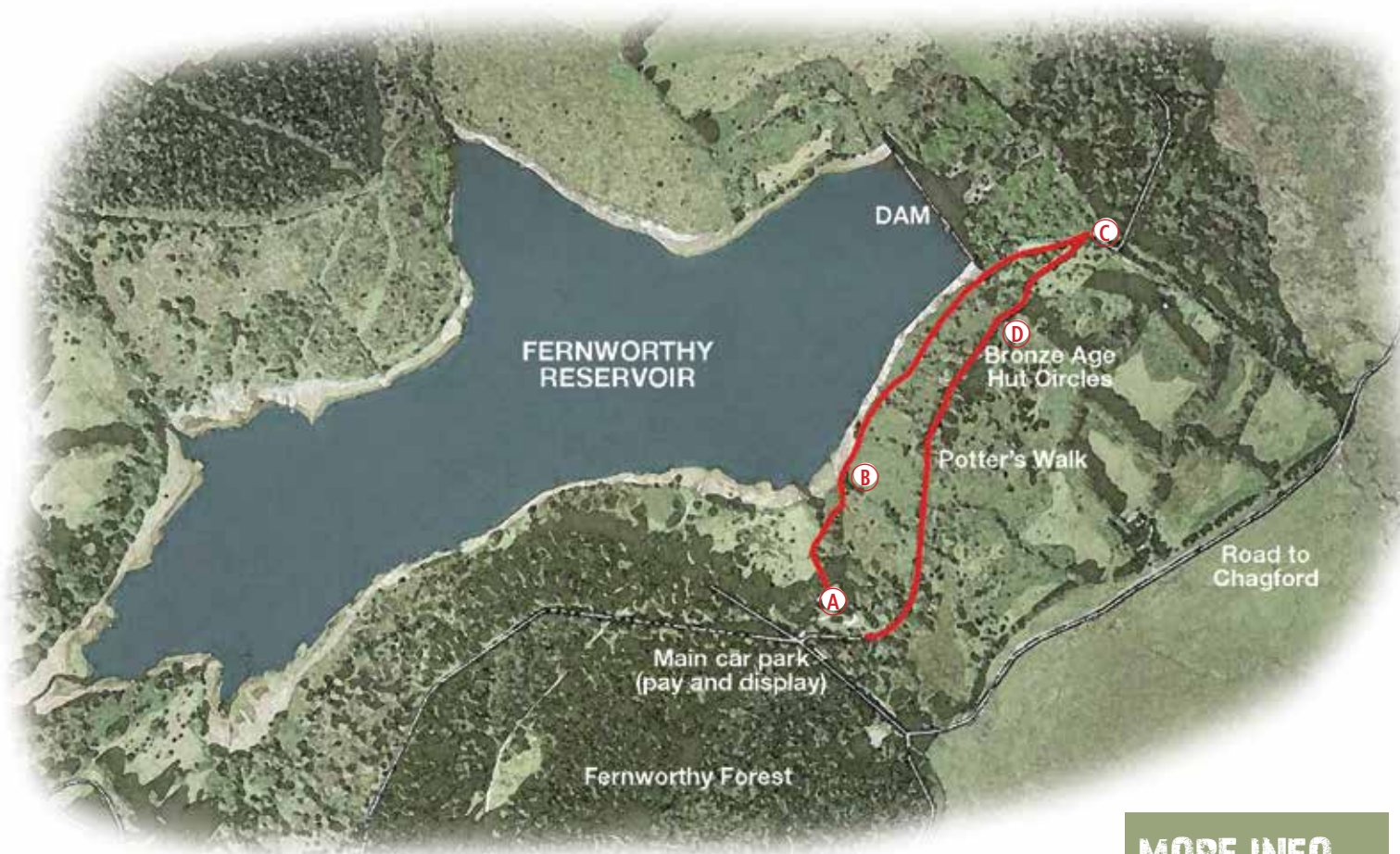
From the Dam the route follows the tarmac access road for a short distance before turning right along a grassy ride. A few hundred metres along here, a high fence on the left protects the sheer drop into one of the disused quarries that provided granite for the Dam. Whatever the weather the still, deep water below appears an eerie green colour.

Heading back to the car park



there are several places to stop and enjoy the views. Look out towards Thornworthy Newtake and the open moorland towards the Longstone and Shoveldown over the skyline, or up the reservoir to the surrounding plantation of ska, Western Hemlock and threatened Larch of Fernworthy Forest. Planted in 1931 the unique combination of relatively mild south westerly weather and high rainfall have made Fernworthy one of the most productive forests in the UK, growing an extra 5000 tones every year. Many tons of timber are felled and lorried out through

Chagford during the winter months and the Forest is now a mosaic of mixed aged stands interspersed with access tracks. These offer many opportunities for longer walks where Red and Roe deer are a common sight in the early mornings and late evenings. During warm summer evenings the scrub and younger conifers around Potters Walk provide an ideal habitat for the visiting nightjar. Stand quietly and listen for its enigmatic churring and watch carefully for the ghostly white wing clap as it flies against the back drop of blue-black trees. ■



- A** Park in the main car park (pay and display) and leave through the picnic site.
- B** Stop a while and look out over the reservoir to Thornworthy Tor. Then follow the path alongside the reservoir to the dam. Look out for great crested grebe and swallows dive-bombing hatching insects.
- C** Walk past the dam, rhododendron and berberis before turning sharp right.
- D** Pass the old quarry from where stone was taken to construct the dam. Then pass the bronze age hut circles which date back 4000 years. Imagine what it would have been like to live up here in these granite circles.

FOOT FILE

LENGTH: 0.75 miles
SURFACE: Rolled growan (local granite sand), grass and tarmac
ACCESS: Mostly relatively flat. No steps, gates or stiles. Well spaced resting places.
FACILITIES: Free parking with disabled parking bays, public toilets (including disabled), picnic area with accessible picnic benches. Bird hides and brown trout fishing close by.

MORE INFO

For more information on this and other reservoir sites contact South West Lakes Trust: 01566 771930; 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 Authority website: www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk