



Mark is a globetrotting freelance travel journalist and photographer writing for many national newspapers and magazines. He lives on Dartmoor with his partner and two slightly naughty horses.

TEIGN & TURRETS

The Teign is Dartmoor's most iconic river. From a bleak moorland spring, it meanders some 50km to the South Devon coast at Teignmouth. This four-hour walk in its upper valley takes in wonderful views and the glorious vision of a certain Mr. Drewe

Photo: NTPL/John Millar



lies shortly before Dogmarsh Bridge near Sandy Park where you'll find a fine inn and accommodation.

Beyond the A382 crossing we enter the National Trust's 240ha Castle Drogo estate and continue ahead keeping the Teign to our right. The estate's *raison d'être*, the castle, looms high on your horizon to the left. But before reaching it our walk along riverside pasture enters a billowing forest of oak, hazel and birch, which is as beautiful as any British woodland. There are inspiring views along this wooded gorge yet first its time for a spot of hard work. Before the Teign's newish suspension-footbridge, a multiple signpost leads us uphill first signed 'Hunter's Path', then 'Castle Drogo'. This climb is breathless both in energy and anticipation.

I defy even the craggiest cynic not to be moved by such imperious views once the 'Hunter's Path' levels out. The spring and early summer canopy is vibrantly lime-green; it tumbles nearly 100m down the

precipitous v-sided gorge into the Teign. Walking eastwards, the juxtaposition of conifers and deciduous trees resemble a patchwork quilt.

I often walk this stretch around late April to find holly blue butterflies and rare pearl-bordered fritillaries with wing patterns resembling stained-glass windows. Conservation work completed by the National Trust along here has created a mosaic of bracken and heather to foster this rare insect. Dartmoor is a refuge for many of our most endangered butterflies including the High Brown and Heath Fritillaries. And don't be surprised to see other natives, Dartmoor ponies, pop out of the woodland along this path.

Decision time? At the next signpost junction go straight ahead towards Fingle Bridge. But for the sake of an hour's diversion it would be a pity to miss out on the anachronistic Castle Drogo itself: a ten-minute stroll uphill to your left.

In the early 1900s self-made millionaire Julius Drewe decided

With pubs, restaurants, and accommodation, the 14th-century tin-mining stannary town of Chagford is the perfect launchpad to commence our walk. Heading northeastwards out of Chagford past the Primary School, hikers first encounter the Teign when crossing Rushford Bridge before joining it beyond Rushford Mill Farm along the Two Moors Way Regional Trail. I've lost count how many times on this alder and willow vegetated stretch of river that I've seen the turquoise flash of kingfishers

or grey herons stalking the crystalline flow. More recently I surprised another paid-up member of this feathery anglers club – a little egret.

Another surprise soon waits with an enchanting sculpture called Granite Song positioned on a little river island. Resembling a cleft boulder, local sculptor Peter Randall-Page is one of many internationally renowned artists who draw inspiration from Dartmoor. His work can be seen along the Thames in London and at The Eden Project. This sculpture



Photo: NTPL/John Millar

the nearby and partly eponymous Drewsteignton village represented his ancestral home. Not only did he purchase the woodland you've been strolling through but also employed the most famous architect of his generation, Sir Edwin Lutyens, to construct the last castle ever finished in England.

Julius Drewe died shortly after its completion in 1931 but he must have been rightly delighted with this Grade I listed castle that was gifted to the National Trust in 1974. Besides an on-site café and toilets, walkers can pay to enter the stylish castle with its forbidding portcullis and octagonal towers or can mosey around the manicured Arts and Crafts-inspired gardens that feature a circular croquet lawn enclosed by a mighty yew hedge.

Excursion over, head back down to the 'Hunter's Path' signpost to continue eastwards (turn left then keep right) through oak plantation towards Fingle Bridge. On this descent, I always pause upon Sharp Tor's rocky promontory to soak in blistering views and listen to clucking ravens while sightings of buzzards wheeling above are commonplace.

Fingle Bridge is reached by turning right when the 'Hunter's Path' eventually intersects a small road. There's been an inn at Fingle Bridge since the late 19th-century while the arched packhorse bridge is at least mid-1600s and probably well beyond. Either side of the valley lays two ancient Iron Age hillforts: Cranbrook and Prestonbury stretching back millennia.



Both are calf-straining yomps uphill but let's save these for another day and enjoy a quick half of cider while watching native brown trout and salmon milling in the Teign's heather tannin-coloured flow.

It's now around 5km back to Chagford. Immediately before the bridge is a gate accessing hikers onto the right-bank (although a flatter if less scenic path alternative runs parallel on the left-bank). The 'Fisherman's Path' is one of Dartmoor's loveliest footpaths: tracing the Teign through dappled oak and hazel woodland. On sunny days the river sparkles ethereally and you'll almost certainly encounter dippers hopping between the mossy rocks while nuthatches fuss around oaks. Halfway along is an old pumping station on the opposite bank.

Drogo estate once generated hydroelectric power from the Teign and if he were alive today, old Master Drewe would be delighted with the National Trust's recent installation of woodchip burning technology to power his castle. Some of the woodland you've passed through will provide this sustainably harvested fuel source.

Eventually you'll recognize the suspension-footbridge reached earlier and you must retrace your footsteps back to Chagford. But just before it is a salmon leap where every November Atlantic salmon pursue epic journeys upriver to spawn in the moorland Teign. This really is a walk for all seasons. ■

FOOT FILE

LENGTH: 12km (7.5 miles)
 TIME: 3-4 hrs
 START/FINISH: Chagford Square
 SUITABLE FOR: Moderately fit
 MAP: OS Explorer OL28
 PUBLIC TRANSPORT: Service 173 from Exeter Bus Station
 PARKING: Chagford car park near Jubilee Hall (GR702874)

Photo: NTP/L/Robert Morris

5 OF THE BEST

CASTLE DROGO

England's newest castle finished in 1930 is an eclectic mix of architectural styles.

PEARL-BORDERED FRITILLARIES

This rare butterfly's favoured habitat is woodland glades and its larvae require decaying bracken to thrive.

HUNTER'S PATH VIEW

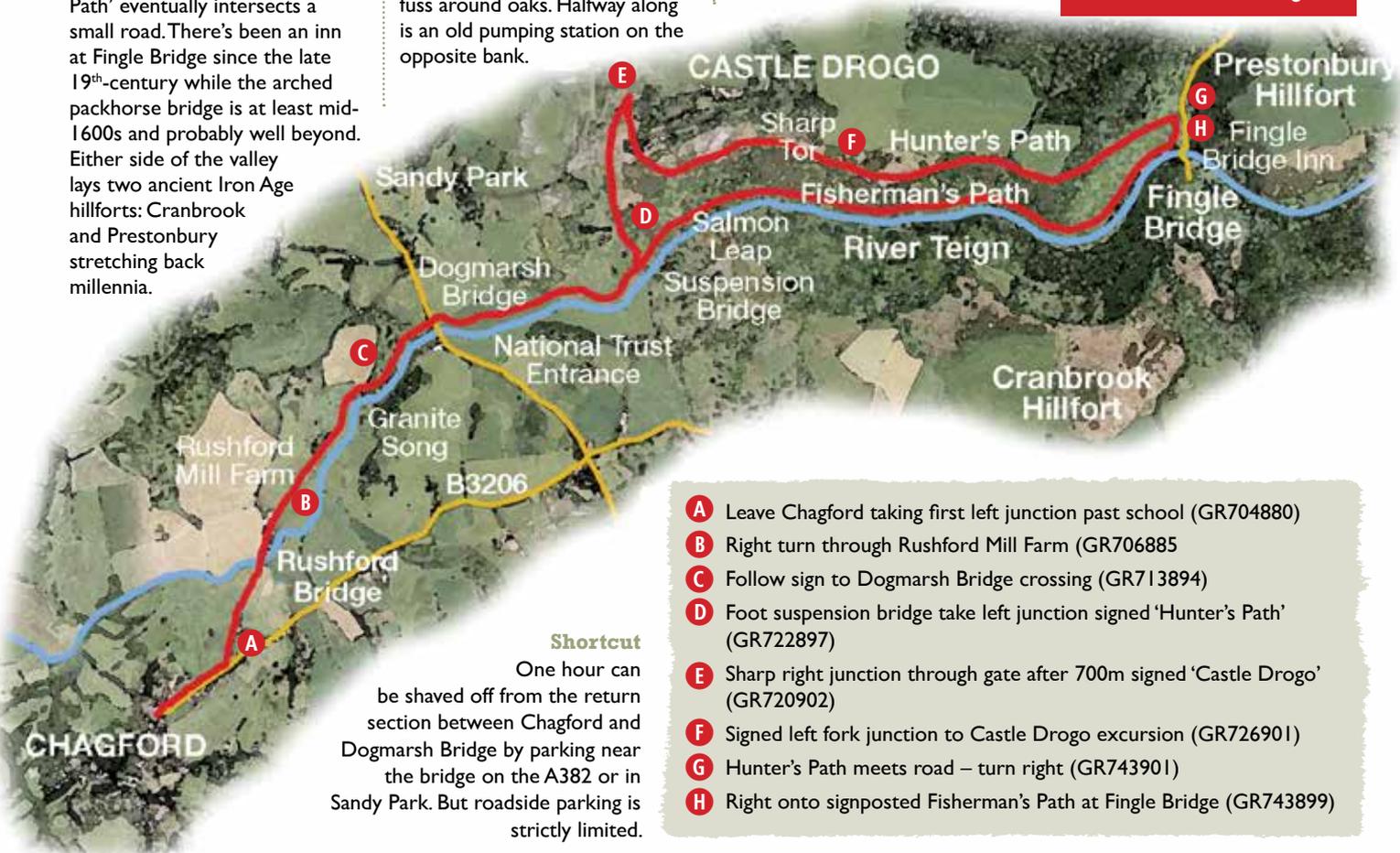
One of the best viewpoints in all Dartmoor.

KINGFISHERS

This resident fisher has upward of 8,000 pairs in the UK. Listen out for its shrill piping birdsong.

FINGLE BRIDGE

Centuries of wagons have trundled over this bridge.



Shortcut

One hour can be shaved off from the return section between Chagford and Dogmarsh Bridge by parking near the bridge on the A382 or in Sandy Park. But roadside parking is strictly limited.

- A** Leave Chagford taking first left junction past school (GR704880)
- B** Right turn through Rushford Mill Farm (GR706885)
- C** Follow sign to Dogmarsh Bridge crossing (GR713894)
- D** Foot suspension bridge take left junction signed 'Hunter's Path' (GR722897)
- E** Sharp right junction through gate after 700m signed 'Castle Drogo' (GR720902)
- F** Signed left fork junction to Castle Drogo excursion (GR726901)
- G** Hunter's Path meets road – turn right (GR743901)
- H** Right onto signposted Fisherman's Path at Fingle Bridge (GR743899)