

# A Dartmoor Dozen

Pete Buckley

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This short collection of bike rides is meant to be a starting point for your imagination. I enjoyed these rides; but they served mainly as prompts for variations. Try them out, gain confidence in your off road cycling and route finding and **go for it!**

I have assumed that you are a cyclist like myself. That is, not afraid of a bit of hard work, mud or bumps. I have also assumed that you have a bike like mine; a basic off road bike that has seen better days! It is nothing flash nor particularly light. Off road cycling is hard work, particularly for your upper body; you'll probably find that you'll take as big a pounding as the bike. Most off road tracks are rough, if you go down a rough bit quickly you will find toe clips a virtual necessity.

Most of these routes will take you onto Dartmoor so consequently you should be aware of normal safety precautions for the Moor.

I carry:  
two spare tubes (and a pump!)  
a set of (four) Allen keys  
a spoke key  
a chain splitter  
a handful of chocolate bars (for emergencies)  
a map and compass  
a water/wind proof jacket  
and a couple of cable ties.

I also carry some food and water (or isotonic drink); this is discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

You should be able to decide what clothing to wear. In the winter you **will** get wet and cold. Do not be foolish, carry a windproof jacket. It may just save your life if you have to change a tube on a bleak and windy hillside! Other clothing choices come from experience and to some extent depend on your wallet. Super light fleeces are excellent but they are also **very expensive**. In summer you will need to keep cool, you might even need to protect yourself from the sun! Legs and arms can get very sunburnt. Padded cycling shorts and fingerless cycling gloves are definitely recommended.

Wear a helmet. These routes can be dangerous in places and you will take your own risks. If you do not wear a helmet do **not** cycle these routes.

I usually plan ahead and familiarise myself with the route. There is nothing worse than reading a map in the teeth of a gale. I also get to know all the possible escape routes (some of these are pointed out in the route descriptions). If I get more than two punctures...then I want to get off the moor quickly and to the nearest 'phone (or pub) to call up transport.

Some of these routes are not circular. You should be able to work out a way to get you and the bike home yourself. Although most of these routes are designed to be about 10

to 15 miles and take about two hours, allowing time to take in the scenery (rests) and water and refuelling stops, some may be shorter or take less time. Times given are only a guide; your actual time will reflect the weather conditions, the ground conditions and how fit you are. In any case they are not meant to be races. Most of these routes make use of a pub at the end. This is for obvious reasons!

Unless otherwise stated, these routes are along bridleways marked on the 1:25,000 map of Dartmoor (OS Outdoor Leisure 28), public roads and tracks and disused railways. Although I have chosen routes along what I believe are public access ways, there is no guarantee that the routes described give you right of way. You are reminded that you should **not** cycle on footpaths. You can, of course, carry your bike on a footpath.

I have graded these routes from 1 to 5, depending how difficult they were when I did them; 1 is easy and 5 is very difficult. Any route that requires a significant section carrying the bike is a 4 or 5, no matter how easy it is afterwards. You probably should not tackle 5's by yourself. I have tried to be honest in judging how difficult these routes are (for me). If you think my grading is wrong, it will give you something to talk about in the pub afterwards! I'm sure that there will be people out there who think that all the routes are 1's: to these people my apologies for not challenging you. Conversely there will be people out there who think that all routes are 5's (or worse): to these people my congratulations for getting out and going for it! It will get easier.

Finally, please remember that you can only ride your bike on public roads and bridleways. The Dartmoor National Park Authority does not allow cycling across open moor or common land. You **must** treat the Moor with respect and try to minimise the amount of damage done by erosion. Be polite to the other users of the Moor. (That group of walkers you talked with and let them across the bridge first, may take the cyclists side if the National Parks try to ban bikes from the Moor). Above all **do not skid** and stick to the **bridleways**.

## **ENERGY AND NUTRITION**

As has been mentioned, most of these routes are designed to take about two hours; some will be longer. All routes will have some (or a lot) of sections where you will have to work hard. Whilst hard work may sharpen your appetite and, perhaps, lose you some weight, you will need to have enough body fuel (stored energy) to finish the route safely. This chapter is to help you think about what you eat and how you can help yourself keep going, when the going gets tough!

The information and advice in this chapter has been provided by John Buckley, a Lecturer in Sports Science.

Whilst it may be nice to lose that extra weight you have been slowly accumulating, you need readily available fuel sources to complete strenuous cycling. If you run out of this body fuel you could be in serious trouble, particularly if it is in the middle of a cold wet unfriendly Dartmoor.

If you think this is a bit of an overstatement, think back to the TV scenes of the marathon runner staggering deliriously from side to side of the road. He was not trying out his latest publicity stunt in front of the TV cameras, he had, quite simply, run out of the necessary fuel.

To help us keep enough fuel on board we should consider some facts.

1. **Carbohydrate**: source of immediately available fuel. Can be used to generate very high rates of energy.

2. **Fat**: source of stored energy, usually plentiful. Used to generate energy at a more constant rate.

3. **Vitamins and Minerals** : regulate chemical reactions. For example, the breakdown of food.

4. **Water**: transports all the above to and from areas of use (e.g. muscles). Absolutely essential for all body functions.

A loss of water of **only 2%** of body weight will cause a 20% loss in performance. Further water loss may lead to dizziness and confusion. Water loss approaching 10% of body weight can result in heat stroke and heat exhaustion, both of which can be life threatening. **Take a water bottle!**

### Fuels for exercise

Carbohydrate and fat are the fuels used by the body. Carbohydrate is broken down to glucose and fat to fatty acids, before being used to power muscle contractions.

At the start of moderate or prolonged exercise almost all the energy comes from glucose

stored in the muscles. After about 20 minutes, half the energy will come from fat metabolism. As exercise continues, levels of glucose stored in the liver and the muscles become further reduced and an increasing proportion of energy comes from fat metabolism.

After 90 to 120 minutes of this fairly intense exercise, the levels of stored glucose can be severely depleted. Blood sugar can reach hypoglycaemic levels. The symptoms of this state include dizziness, weakness and hunger.

The higher the level of stored glucose in the liver and muscles, the longer the activity can be maintained. Increasing levels of stored glucose, by eating more carbohydrate, will increase your endurance.

One of the benefits of regular cycling (endurance training) is that the body learns to use fat as its primary source of energy during exercise. This means that more glucose will be available for that really tough hill climb. It may also delay the point of fatigue.

Carbohydrate eaten during exercise will be used immediately and will thus help preserve stored glucose levels.

One of the best ways to take on board more carbohydrate is to eat bananas. These contain an ample supply of glucose and minerals and together with a drink of water will provide most of what your body needs.

Alternatively you could opt to carry a bottle of commercially available sports drink.

Eating chocolate bars is not recommended, unless in emergency.

After exercise the refuelling of lost carbohydrate and fluid is very important. A carbohydrate based meal (e.g. potatoes, rice or pasta) eaten within 2 hours of exercise will most readily replenish your depleted glucose stores.

However, be warned, it can take 24 hours or more to fully replenish glucose stores. Thus during successive days of a tough cycling weekend, glucose levels will become progressively lower. At these times a high carbohydrate diet is even more important.

Even following the advice above to keep the fuel levels up, things can go wrong and you may find yourself in a state of fatigue in the middle of a cold wet Dartmoor. This is when the windproof jacket you are carrying will come into it's own.

Although you may not have enough carbohydrate to let you cycle off the moor, you have almost unlimited fat supplies which should allow you to walk off the moor or cycle off at a severely reduced rate. The jacket will keep you warm as the body generates less heat when working less hard.

Finally a supply of food and drink in the car, waiting for your return is definitely recommended. The thought of these provisions may even spur you up that final hill!

## **ROUTE ONE**

### **DUNNABRIDGE CIRCUIT 1**

#### **DUNNABRIDGE-SHERBERTON-PRINCEHALL-DUNNABRIDGE**

Grade 1. Two river crossings, which would be difficult(!) in flood. About 7 miles taking about 1½ hours. Signposted in places.

Park in the area just above Dunnabridge farm (SX 643746). Cycle along the road and down the hill. Although the track on your right looks inviting, it only goes to Dunnabridge Farm. Instead continue up the road and cross the cattle grid. The bridleway is half way up the little slope and there is a clear gap in the verge on your right. Go down here towards the gate. Take heed of the warning on the gate.

From the road you can see the river bank that you will soon be cycling along. You also can see the pillars of a ruined bridge or tram way, which is no longer useful.

From the gate there is a nice down hill section to the bank of the West Dart River. As usual the going is rougher through gates and openings. One of these nearly had me flying!

Like most rivers on Dartmoor this one is fast flowing and will rise and fall very quickly with heavy rain. Indeed, when I first reconnoitred this route it was a week after the wettest period for many years. The river had risen very high and washed most of the banks clean. The path had taken quite a pounding and had been badly eroded and was therefore very rough. It was interesting seeing dried grass caught in the branches of the trees and bushes near my shoulder.

Follow along the river bank. In places the going is too rough to ride; but it is a nice walk. Try to avoid cutting up the mud going through the soft bits.

Eventually you should see a sign post at the river confluence (SX 648738). Aim for this. You'll now see your next obstacle: the river. There are stepping stones across here, so if you cannot see them turn around and go back! The first time I crossed here, only about a quarter of the stones were clear of water; these had ice on them. I managed a safe crossing so you should be able to carry your bike across and continue along the river bank, this time of the River Swincombe.

The River Swincombe drains from the incredibly marshy Foxtor Mires and flows through a dam (where there is a water intake) before reaching here. Upstream a leat (Wheal Emma Leat) also runs parallel to the river. This is a small part of a complicated water system in the Swincombe valley that was used for tin mining at Whiteworks or Gobbett.

This river bank is much the same as before. Again I found it rough after the river had flooded and a bit soft in places. You will soon see a bridge across the Swincombe. Unfortunately, as you get near the bridge you will see a signpost pointing across the



river via more stepping stones. Do not be tempted to cut across the fields and walls to get to the bridge. (You will actually find the stones easier). Once across the river go through the gate and turn right up the hill to Sherberton.

As the hill is quite steep, I cycled down to the bridge (for a rest!) and then back up the road to Sherberton. Go through the farm and carry straight on through all the gates. The ground is rough but not loose.

Once through the last gate you will see another signpost. You should follow the direction indicated and go across the field. Do not follow the track down hill or you will end up at Little Sherberton. Aim for the corner wall passing a stone circle (?) on your left. You should be able to see the signpost.

The corner opening in the boundary wall is wet and muddy. Try to get through without too much damage and then go right, up a slight climb. You are following the wall. At the top of this climb you will come to another signpost; again follow the direction indicated. Although there appears to be an obvious path do not follow the wall any more.

You will soon come to a well signposted cross roads (SX 634726). Straight on is signposted to WHITEWORKS, left is signposted to SWINCOMBE and is a private path with permitted access. You are also definitely informed that NO CYCLING is allowed down this route.

The way you have just come is from SHERBERTON, to the right is signposted to PRINCEHALL. You should take this turn.

The track here is grassy and a bit rough; again it can be very muddy going through the gates. Once through the gate the track becomes very rough and stony. It is also likely to be wet as you approach the Rue Lake ford. When I first came down this track there was a lot of ice about and I had quite a job to keep going! Once through the ford you continue along the track. As you head towards the gates the going gets smoother. At the gates the way is signposted.

Once through the gate on the right, there is a very quick and rough downhill. Watch out for the gate at the bottom. It's hidden round a corner and you can have built up quite a speed before you see it!

Through the gate and across the river, this time by bridge. Go past Devon County Council's Dartmoor Training Centre and continue up the tarmacked track. Follow this round to your left, over a cattle grid and then sharp right. This track goes up to the Two Bridges - Dartmeet road (SX 624747). Turn right and follow the road back to the car park.

## ROUTE TWO

### PRINCETOWN CIRCUIT

#### PRINCETOWN-BURRATOR-SWELLTOR-PRINCETOWN

Grade 3. Can be wet and muddy in places. Rough going on the descent to Burrator. About 14 miles taking about 2 hours.

Park in the public car park at Princetown (SX 589735). This is quite a useful car park for setting off for many different routes. It is always busy, particularly so in summer. There are toilets here and there are several pubs close by.

From the car park turn right, then right again and go straight over the T-junction. Go through the gate and climb up the track. On your right is a camp site (for the brave!). There are drainage channels dug across this track, some of these are deep but they should not be a problem going uphill, providing you can keep your momentum going.

Once through the gate at the top of this hill you begin on the gentle climb up to South Hessary Tor. You can tell this route is very popular due to the heavy erosion from walkers, riders and cyclists alike. This section of the path has been improved to prevent further erosion; do not leave the path or you will cause more erosion. Watch out for the drainage ditches. There is then a slight climb to the Tor.

Having climbed to the top of the Tor there is a downhill across a wide peaty track. Again, the path has been improved to prevent erosion and is hard and fast. Watch out for the drainage ditches!

There is a very quick down hill bit that goes through old mine workings. If you are going quick, take care going into and over the hump! You are then into another slight up hill section where the path has been improved. You are following a line of boundary stones here.

This part of the route ends as you cross a rough stone track (SX 602708). To your left the road is about 50m down this track; to your right the track drops down to Burrator reservoir. I call this junction 'Peat Cot' crossroads.

Anyway, back to the cycling. (I also stop here for a quick drink).

You now turn right and go down a rough stone track. This track is quite steep so you'll need some braking. Half way down this hill is **not** the time to be thinking whether your tyres are hard enough or if your brakes need adjusting. When I had just bought my bike I came down here. I had a blow out going over the rough stuff and then broke my (old) pump. I was lucky that a couple of careful blows with a rock fixed the pump! That's when I started to think...

At the bottom of this first hill you cross Devonport Leat in a swooping switchback over

Older Bridge. This area is riddled with old tin workings. I have come down here, during the week, in late spring and seen Army type people training in the mine workings above here. They were firing, presumably blanks; I still have not found out whether they should have been there.

Across the small water splash and then up along a quick sandy track. On your right is Devonport Leat (the leat that was built to supply Plymouth with drinking water. Now it only takes water as far as Burrator reservoir, but from there the water still goes to Plymouth), on your left you can see a cross and, in the middle distance, old mine workings.

Having gone through a scenic quick section you are back onto the rough rocky track downwards. This part of the track I always think is very rough; and would be graded a 5. If you are not used to it, coming down here is really hard work. If you happen to come down here after heavy rain you will find the track even rougher: the run off washes away all the soft bits!

Coming through that, you go across another small water splash and can take a quick breather before the final descent into Raddick Plantation. This run down to the gate can be exceptionally quick; remember that the gate is usually shut.

The track becomes a lot smoother allowing you to pick up a bit of speed going through the chicane. At the bottom of this track there is a big drainage channel across the road. Watch it.

Turn right. When wet this junction can be fun. Follow the track round left and then right. This is another very quick, but rough, downhill section. At the bottom you cross another track and go across a bridge before climbing up a short sharp hill. No doubt, going up this hill, you will have the time to look around and see a big hole going off to your right. It does not go anywhere - but it looks like it should! At the top of this hill you will cross Devonport Leat again.

After crossing the leat continue down the track until it meets the road; when you get to the road go straight on through the woods. You will cross the old railway and then come to a T-junction. Go right. This road then meets with the main Yelverton-Princetown road. You want to go right again and climb up the hill. As you start to drop back down again you will see a car park on your left, you should go into this car park. A grassy track runs from the back of this car park. This is a fast down hill, although the corner at the bottom is rough.

Here you have a choice, you can turn right and go up the old railway. You will eventually meet with this route; but it is not as much fun. Alternatively you should cross the old railway track and go through the gate (where there is a signpost). Continue along this fast track going through the gate, before beginning another quick downhill.

Take care, at the bottom of this hill you will need to go right and follow the track through a gate to a small bridge. Just before the bridge is a signpost for the bridleway. If you go

past the post, about five metres, you will see a track off to your right. The bridleway is marked with little spots of blue paint. Follow these across a small stream and then across the field. There are many large rocks to avoid; in places you will have to carry your bike. Eventually you should see another gate, go through this and onto the old railway track and go right, down hill.

At the corner, turn left and climb up the steep track at the side of the wall. If you followed the railway track up around Ingra Tor this left turn will be a right for you, and is where you rejoin this route. Follow this track up and round until you come to the railway track again. You should then follow the railway track back to Princetown. Riding along this track is relatively easy, you do not really notice that you are climbing; unless you happen to be cycling against the wind!

At the end of this track the path to the car park you left two hours ago is obvious. From the car park it is but a short walk to one of the pubs!

## **ROUTE THREE**

### **TWO BRIDGES CIRCUIT**

#### **TWO BRIDGES-PEAT COT-NUN'S CROSS-PRINCETOWN-TWO BRIDGES**

Grade 4. A river crossing, a lot of wet stuff and a lot of climbing. About 7 miles taking about 1¼hours. Signposted in places.

Park in the old quarry at Two Bridges (SX 609751). Cycle down the hill across the bridge and turn left towards Princetown. Climb up this fairly steep hill, you will eventually have a wood on your left. Soon after entering this lovely section of road you will see a gate on your left. The signpost directs you straight down the track through the wood to another gate. From here follow the direction of the signpost and cross the field to the far corner. You will soon be able to see the gate in the wall. Through this gate you should continue to follow the direction indicated; this should find you heading towards a rather bedraggled fir tree. Having crossed this field you will go down hill through an opening and along a rough track. In places this can be wet.

If you continue to follow the obvious track it bears slightly right and finally reaches the Blackbrook River. You can see that horses cross here, so you should be able to cycle across if you want. However, there is a foot bridge slightly downstream from here. To get to this bridge you can clamber along the river bank. Alternatively if you bear left as you come out of the soft bit, just after the opening, you should find yourself on a down hill towards the bridge.

Cross the bridge and head for the signpost. The bridleway now goes along the river bank on the river side of the wall. You will have to go through a couple of gates. In places the track is rough; it can also be wet.

At the end of the wall there is a little bridge across a very wet bit. After this, go through the gate and climb up the hill. This is rough at the top where it joins the farm track. Carry straight on and you will come to a T-junction. Do not take the track signposted to Princetown...unless you want to go for an early drink. Instead follow the track signposted to Peat Cot; you should continue to follow the blue signs. This is a fast farm track that eventually bears left and up hill onto the Moor. Continue through the gate and along the lower track. This is quite rough. The track soon finishes and you should then follow the wall (look for the blue markers). The going then gets quite wet as you go across the moor. In the distance you can see a small wood and a house. This is what you are aiming for.

As you go down the slight hill it is likely to be wet and boggy. I managed to get through here only by wearing ankle length wellies. In the dip at the bottom, there is a small foot bridge across a small stream. (Although it does land you right into a big mud splash). From here there is a nasty climb up to a gate.

Through this gate, you continue towards Peat Cot. The bridleway runs just below

Devonport Leat. Continue along the track through Peat Cot and begin another hard and rough climb up to the road. You will come out onto the road exactly opposite the start of the rough track down to Burrator that is described in Route Two. (In about 20 minutes you will be climbing back up this track).

At the road turn left and continue until you see a small track off ahead of you (SX 604708). There is a little sign telling motorists that they cannot go any further. Go down this grassy track. It becomes rough towards the bottom, just as you pick up speed on your descent. At the bottom you should see Nun's Cross farm and on your right Nun's Cross. Head for the Cross and then go sharp right back on yourself.

This takes you back onto the track to Princetown. Climb up the hill and carry on along the track. This path has been improved. It used to be exceptionally wet. However, as part of the improvements, there are several deep drainage channels across the path. These are not that easy to get over. It is also quite likely that the first one will catch you unawares, as you speed along this fast track. Do **not** be tempted to go round the drainage channels. You will just make the path wider, muddier and less pleasant; in fact, you will start the process that made it necessary to improve this path.

This path crosses a rough grassy track. Here you have a choice; if you go straight on you will quickly rejoin this route. Alternatively you should turn left and follow the grassy track down. It is not as rough as the descent described in Route Two, but the grass can hide the odd hole or rock. At the bottom of this descent, go to your right and pick up the rough stony track.

You can now practice your rough hill climbing. As you climb this hill you probably will be thinking how much easier it was coming down here on Route Two! You probably will also be wishing that you had gone straight over the crossroads. The climb will do you a lot of good (and it will certainly make the pint worked for!)

At the top of the climb you will come to the 'Peat Cot' crossroads mentioned in Route Two. You will also rejoin those who carried straight on from Nun's Cross.

Turn left and follow the obvious track to South Hessary Tor and from there down to Princetown. I have described this track in detail, although in the other direction, during Route Two, so I will not repeat myself; save to say that you should stay on the path and avoid causing further damage.

The descent into Princetown, past the camp site on your left used to be very quick. However during recent heavy rains it became necessary to dig drainage channels across this track. If you are going too fast these may trip you up. Watch it.

Once through the gate head towards the road and turn right. You are now on the Princetown-Two Bridges road. Follow this for a couple of miles back to your car in the quarry behind Two Bridges. Along this road you will get an excellent view of Dartmoor prison. A bit further along, the road goes through a beautiful wooded section. I think this is very typical of 'English' countryside. It makes a very pleasant ride (or drive) on a

summers' evening.

Having returned to your car, you can now contemplate that pint you sweated and cursed for going up the hill to Peat Cot Crossroads. I hope you enjoy it. I did!

## **ROUTE FOUR**

### **PRINCETOWN TO PLYMPTON**

#### **PRINCETOWN-EYLESBARROW-RINGMOOR-CLEARBROOK-PLYMPTON**

Grade 3. Wet and muddy in places. Rough going on the descent to Sheepstor. A couple of big hill climbs on the road. About 16 miles taking about 1½ hours.

This route is not circular and will probably require a car at either end for the journey home.

The start of this route is the same as for Route Two as far as Peat Cot Crossroads.

Unlike in Route Two, where you turn right, you should go straight on and head for Nun's Cross. The section of path from Peat Cot Crossroads to Nun's Cross has been improved. It is now hard under wheel and can be fast. However there are several deep drainage channels across the path; these will require some care to get across. Do **not** be tempted to go wide and avoid the channels as this will begin the erosion which made the path improvements necessary.

As Nun's Cross farm comes into view you will begin a short sharp descent. You will then come out in front of Nun's Cross (SX 605699).

Although you cannot see it, at Nun's Cross farm you will cross Devonport Leat. The Leat goes in a tunnel under here from Nun's Cross farm to Drivage Bottom.

There is now quite a nasty climb ahead. The path is quite wide and goes, very obviously, straight ahead. However you will need to veer left just after starting the climb and take the less obvious route. The climb is rough in places as the surface changes from grass to rough rock but it should be possible to climb up the path. Again try to resist the temptation to go wide onto the grass as this will only cause further erosion.

At the top of the climb the path becomes a rough rocky track. This can be quick, but the loose rocks can cause problems. As the track levels out there is a water splash to negotiate. It is not that deep, so you should make it through the middle. You can also make it round on the right without too much trouble.

From here the track is smooth and sandy. As you approach the abandoned shafts and spoil heaps of Eylesbarrow Tin mine you should follow the track round to your left and go through the workings. If you continue straight on the track becomes **very** narrow and winds its way around the abandoned shafts and spoil. In places there is very little between you and a nasty drop. Either way (and I **do** recommend the track to your left) you will end up in the abandoned Eylesbarrow Tin Mine complex.

This is a suitable place to have a rest, refuel and admire the view. You can see down to Plymouth on a clear day. In the middle distance you can see English China Clays Lee



Moor clay works. At the bottom of the hill you can just see the tops of a collection of fir trees. These surround the Scout Hut at Sheepstor. You will soon be down at this hut.

Around you are abandoned and ruined buildings: as you sit amongst them you cannot really imagine what it must have been like when the mine was in full swing. The track you have just come up was the tin workers route up from Nun's Cross and the bigger mine workings at Whiteworks. The track you are about to descend must have once been a very busy route, carrying men, machines and ore. It must also have been a lot smoother!

You now begin the fast descent to Sheepstor. The track is rough in places but is otherwise smooth and hard. You will build up a lot of speed by the time you reach the level. There is a muddy bit where the track forks left (SX 593678). You should carry straight on, up a slight incline and then begin another rough descent.

Although this descent is quite steep and very rough, you should stay on the track and not go wide onto the grass. In places there are sudden drops on the track. If you are going full tilt when you hit these, it can be fun! It gets rougher towards the bottom, but you do eventually come onto cobbles over a small leat (Langstone Leat) above the Scout hut. Once over the leat and down a short track you will come to the road.

Follow the road past Nattor and go left at the junction. You will begin a slight climb up Ringmoor Down, but it should seem easy in comparison to the climb up from Nun's Cross. At the top of the Down you will get marvellous views, particularly of Sheeps Tor and Burrator reservoir. If it is a fine day then I hope you think that it was worth the effort!

You should continue past Ringmoor Cottage and follow the road to the junction. Here go right and then next left down to Lovaton. The road is narrow and there are a few sharp bends. Go down the steep hill through Lovaton and round to your right. Continue to the T-junction where you should turn right and then take the next left to Hoo Meavy. Take care as you cross this road: it is the Yelverton to Cadover Bridge road and cars coming down hill can be going very fast.

The road down to Hoo Meavy goes through a beautiful wooded section (Older Plantation) before dropping down into the village. At the junction go right and cross the River Meavy before beginning a long hard climb up into Clearbrook.

There is a very good pub in Clearbrook (The Skylark) where the beer is certainly worth cycling for. It is always tempting to stop here and have a pint and some lunch. If you do stop, remember that you still have about 6 miles left to cycle.

Opposite the pub there is a grassy track that goes across the down. Follow this through the gorse bushes and continue until you reach the road. When wet this track can be very sticky and heavy going with mud.

Before you go left onto the road you have a choice to make. Do you want to cycle through the tunnel (unlit) or not? If it is a dull or overcast day I suggest that you do not

go through the tunnel; otherwise you should.

If you are going through the tunnel, go left onto the road and follow it down a steep hill. This road is often busy, particularly on Sundays, so be careful. Go past a left turn and you will see the start of the cycle track signposted. This cycle track makes use of the old railway down to Plympton. It is very popular with cyclists and walkers and you are likely to meet many people.

Very soon after getting onto the track you will enter the tunnel. Going towards Plympton, you can almost see all the way through the tunnel. Once through the tunnel you should continue along the track and cross a viaduct.

If you are not going through the track go straight on at the corner. This will take you off road and across the down. When you reach the road turn left and go down the hill. At the junction go straight on down the hill. At the bottom go right and then next right. Very soon up this right turn you will see a turning onto the cycle track. You join the cycle track at an old station, presumably Shaugh Holt. At this old station you will join those who have braved the tunnel.

Soon after this, the track joins the road for a short distance, going past the training camp at Bickleigh, before continuing down to Plympton. The track down to Plympton does not really require describing in detail. It is a very pleasant ride in beautiful surroundings and, because it is a gentle downhill all the way, is usually very quick. At the bottom you go past a military depot before coming out onto road. Follow the signs for the cycle path to Saltram House. This should take you under the A38. From here you can head towards your car; I usually park near the Plympton sewage works, so therefore go left here.

If you are picking another car up from Princetown you probably will get less of a reaction in your cycling gear from the pubs there, they seem used to it!

## **ROUTE FIVE**

### TAVY CIRCUIT

#### PETER TAVY-MARY TAVY-CUDLIPTOWN-PETER TAVY

Grade 3. About 16 miles taking 1½ hours. More than half road but with a hard steep off road climb (grade 4).

This route is my foul weather one. Although it uses a lot of roads these are fairly quiet. The off road bits are frequent and varied. There are some very good views along this route.

You should start near the Peter Tavy Inn (SX 513778). Parking is limited and will be along the roads, either to the pub or to the church. Be polite, do not block drives and do not use the pub car-park without permission.

Go past the Peter Tavy Inn and continue down the track. After about 20m you turn left onto a signposted bridleway. If you miss this turning you will soon come to some houses. If this happens go back and find the turning.

The bridleway starts tarmacked but soon gives way to a stony farm track. This track goes to a gate on your right. The bridleway continues down a narrow rough path. As you go round the corner you will begin to go down hill. The path is quite rough as you drop down to the level. On your left is the River Tavy.

Go through the gate and continue over the rough bit. This eventually drops to a foot bridge across the Tavy. Cross the bridge and go through the gate. You are now on a good shale track that curves round to your left as it goes up hill. At the top of the hill you will go past the Mary Tavy hydroelectric power station. This is a National Power station that uses water from Wheal Jewell reservoir (SX 523813). Originally this reservoir would have produced hydro power for the surrounding tin mines.

As you pass the hydro station you will be cycling on tarmac. Follow this road past the church. Continue to the junction, where you should go right, up the hill into Mary Tavy. You will go past a very picturesque thatched cottage on your right and, a bit further on, the primary school on your left. Just past the school, turn right towards Horndon. A sign here points that this is the way to the Elephant's Nest.

This part of the route is all up hill, but only for about three miles. The first section, just after the turning, is surprisingly steep. However, once you have rounded the sharp bends it does level out a bit. Continue along this road. Although it is only a minor road, there is often a lot of traffic, presumably due to the Elephant's Nest pub. You will pass a turning on your left to Axna. A bit further on you will pass the Elephant's Nest on your right.

This pub is another one that is worth stopping at. There is usually a selection of good

beers available. The food is also recommended, particularly if you do not eat meat. The entrance at the back is very low and can catch you unawares, especially on the way out! Although it is often worth stopping here to sample the beer, it is probably not a sensible thing to do now. The remaining 8 miles are quite hard.

Continue past the pub and through Horndon. You go past the Church and up a short hill. Once over the cattle grid you can see the top of the hill ahead. From here it is all down hill for a couple of miles.

As you go past the houses on your right, you will see Wheal Jewell reservoir on your left. This is the top end of the Mary Tavy hydroelectric power station you past earlier. From the climb you have just come up, you will realise that there is quite a drop from reservoir to station.

Once past the cottages you should take the next right (SX 525807) and follow this road round until it reaches a gate. The left corner is normally submerged under a large puddle. After this puddle the tarmac runs out and you are onto a farm track. Go through the gate and follow the track to the left and then right. If it has been raining recently it is likely to be wet and muddy.

You can pick up a bit of speed down this track. However, a couple of words of warning; the track does twist and turn a bit and if you are going too quick then you will find yourself in the hedge. There are a couple of farms down this track. One wet Friday morning, as I was going down this track I nearly ended up on the bonnet of a Landrover. I am not sure who was more surprised, me or the lady occupants of the Landrover!

As you follow the track round you will cross a small stream. The bridge across it has given the track a small switchback. It can be quite interesting coming over this if you do not have a good line! You will then see a farm on your right. Go past the farm and bear right towards the gate.

Go through the gate and begin a short sharp downhill. It is very rough going. You will soon level out and go past a house on your right. Soon after this you will come to a gate. Through this gate you will rejoin the road.

Go down the road and over the Tavy via Hill Bridge. The road sweeps round right and then, very shortly, round to the left. Once you have gone left you are going up hill. This hill is not very long but it **is** very steep. At the top of the hill go right. As you regain your breath you will see that you have crossed the Tavy valley and that you are now back at the height you were at on the road past Hordon.

Continue along the road for about a mile and a half. You will then come into Cudliptown. Turn left here and follow the road. You will go past a farm and then begin to go up hill.

This hill climb is **long** and **hard**, but it is very satisfying when you get top the top! The road turns left and, shortly after, right as it winds itself up the steep hillside. Shortly after this corner you will see a track going off to your left. There is also a signpost here (SX

526788). You should follow this track to your left. It is rough under wheel and, in places, wet. Soon, you are cycling on a rough track between two walled fields. Ahead, and above of you, looms White Tor. Eventually you will come to a gate.

Once through the gate you are on the open Moor. This is a good place to stop and take in the view (i.e. rest). I usually refuel and have a drink of water here. Below, you can see Tavistock, Mary Tavy, Peter Tavy and Horndon. In the distance you can see Brentor and just make out the Church. On a clear day, the view from here almost makes the climb worth it!

You should now head off onto the moor, keeping the wall to your right. Soon you will see the track go through two walled fields. You should follow the track, all the time keeping the wall on your right. After a short section along a grassy track, you will go over a small water splash and then come to a stony army track. This track goes from near Peter Tavy church to White Tor. You should cross it here and continue to follow the grassy track. Where this bridleway crosses the other bridleway is called Stephen's Grave (SX 537782).

The grassy track veers left as you begin to go down hill. You are aiming for the bottom corner of the wall. The track crosses a small stream and continues down to meet the Colly Brook. You will have to ford this brook, if you are lucky you will be able to ride all the way across. If not then you will get a wet foot. I have found that by getting in the lowest gear and dropping down the river bank quickly, I can get across without getting wet...most times anyway!

Once across the ford you should go through the gate and head to your right. On the other side of the field you can see the gate that you are aiming for. This field is often wet and it can be quite hard going.

Once through the gate you should head for the tree. As you get to the tree you will join a sandy track. Follow this track up a steep stony climb. At the top, the track becomes grassy before joining a tarmacked road. On your left is Cox Tor.

Follow the road for about a mile until it joins the Tavistock-Princetown road half way up Pork Hill (SX 524753). Turn right and enjoy the long fast downhill. It certainly is more fun going down than struggling up! At the bottom of this hill there is a crossroads. You want to turn right towards Peter Tavy.

Follow this road until you come to another steep down hill. Take care on the descent as there is a nasty corner at the bottom. At the bottom you will see a crossroads where you should turn right. Follow this road, which turns sharp left, until you come to a junction. Here you should go right and follow this road into Peter Tavy and back to your car.

I'm sure that you will find the Peter Tavy Inn a refreshing place to catch your breath and discuss this route. I am also certain that you will have earned at least the first pint!

## **ROUTE SIX**

### **DUNNABRIDGE CIRCUIT 2**

#### **DUNNABRIDGE-BELLEVER-WARREN HOUSE INN-POSTBRIDGE-DUNNABRIDGE**

Grade 4. A long route through forests and across moorland. A few miles on a main road. About 18 miles taking 2 hours.

Park at the car park above Dunnabridge Farm (SX 643746). Leave the car park and go right down the hill. Just before the cattle grid you will see a track double back on itself. You should take this. If you have gone over the cattle grid you have gone too far. Follow the track until you reach the gate. Through the gate you will begin a hard rough climb. In places it is loose.

As you climb up this hill you will soon be able to see another gate. Behind you there is a fabulous view across the Southern moor. As ever, the TV mast at Princetown dominates the horizon. You should go through the gate and carry on along a fast dirt track. You may not notice, as you speed along this track, that another bridleway crosses it. Soon you will come to another gate, after which you will begin a slight descent. On your right you may notice the remains of old mine workings, which are not, for some reason, shown on the map.

At the next gate you will see a signpost for another bridleway. This should be ignored. Instead you should go through the gate and downhill towards Laughter Hole farm. The times that I have been through this gate it has only just been hanging on by one hinge! If it is in the same condition, treat it with respect.

Through the gate you come onto a typical forest track. This track sweeps left uphill and, straight ahead, downhill. Luckily, you want to go downhill. The downhill is fast and rough. At the bottom there is a gate and, a short distance further on, another one. Once through this gate you will find that you have the forest on your left.

Carry straight on down this forest track. It is the sort of track you can easily imagine meeting a speeding rally car on. Ahead of you can be seen a signpost and a track going off to your right. You do **not** want to take this turning.

Shortly after passing the right turn there will be a steeper downhill bit, at the bottom of which you will need to go off right. There is a signpost here directing you through a small gate. The path then goes through a picnic area on the side of the East Dart River. There is a slight climb before the track levels out and joins the road.

At the road you turn right and go over a delightful little bridge (Believer Bridge). On your right there is a clapper bridge. It still looks functional, but I have never stopped to try it out.

Once over the bridge you will begin a long steady climb up Riddon common. This hill is

the real reason I have never tried the clapper bridge. The thought of getting back on my bike to climb the hill puts me off!

Eventually you will get to the top of the hill and, as if to prove one of the laws of physics, you will then begin to descend. As you go down the hill you may notice an old quarry on your left. It now serves life as a convenient car park. Continue down the hill, across a small river (the Walla Brook) and then a cattle grid. The road begins a gentle climb.

Ahead you will be able to see a line of trees on both sides of the road. The bridleway goes left at this line of trees (SX 677772). The entrance to this field is usually very muddy. Once through you will be on a rough grassy track. Follow this track across Cator common. The path is signposted through the common.

The path is fast and sandy but it is narrow in places and can be very wet and muddy. The track veers to the left towards a gate. The track to the gate is hard and sandy under wheel but it is very badly rutted. Any speed you manage to build up, will quickly bring you against a rut.

Through the gate you should go straight on across a gorsy common. The path will very soon meet the road. At the road, turn right.

Follow the road past the forest on your left (Soussons Down). You will soon begin a downhill. About half way down the hill you will see a track going off to your left (SX 682787). There is a very rough and stony descent along this track before it comes to a gate and crosses a stream. The gate is difficult to see until you are too close to do anything about it! Luckily the first time I came down here a farmer very kindly held the gate open for me. I just managed to stop before the next gate on the other side of the stream.

Once through the gates and across the stream you continue on a forest track. The forest will be on your left. Soon you will come to Soussons Farm. The bridleway is signposted to your left. This will bring you away from the farm. On the other side of the gate the track becomes grassy and very muddy. If there have been cattle or horses along this track it will be extremely heavy going through the mud. You will need to get through a couple of fences before you enter the forest.

Around the gate into the forest it is very muddy. This heavy mud continues through the gate and up the hill. Recently the forest has been thinned and extracting the timber has definitely churned the mud up. I have not managed to cycle up this track due to the mud.

At the top of the hill you should cross the forest road and climb up a sharp hill through the forest. This path is also likely to be muddy. Follow the track and signposts and you will soon drop onto the forest road. Follow this road downhill. As it gets rough towards the bottom you should be able to see some abandoned mine workings.

The path turns sharp right and then left as it winds through the old buildings. The track here is hard and stony. After rain the track can be wet; the puddles will have a copper

shine to them from the leachate off the old mine spoil.

Further along this track you will come to a grassy area (SX 682810). All around you there is evidence of the industrial past of Dartmoor. In places the pools at the side of the track look very black and evil. This is certainly **not** a place to fall off! Looking at the spoil heaps and scarred hillside this place must have once been a very busy mining complex.

Early one autumn morning, I came into this disused mine and was able to watch a couple of herons fishing in the stream. If there are herons about, it cannot be too bad around here!

The track soon opens out into a wide grassy area. There is a bridge across the stream and a ruined building close by. It seems that this is a walkers crossroads. Straight ahead of you over the bridge there is a very steep and eroded path through the spoil heaps. The track takes the less direct (and less steep!) route to your right. This track soon sweeps back on itself a couple of times as it winds up the hillside. At the top of the climb the track becomes very rough and stony. Luckily this section is not too long. As an added incentive you can see the Warren House Inn above you on the left.

The Warren House Inn is the highest pub in southern England. Originally it served as an inn for the miners and cattlemen crossing the moor. The name 'Warren' goes back to the times when there was a rabbit warren close by.

Inside the beer is good and is certainly refreshing. Apart from the beer, there are a few other interesting things inside. One of which is the fire. It is said that the fire has **never** gone out. On the bar there are a number of photos of 1963 when the pub got snowed up. It certainly is a very bleak place out here and you can just imagine being rescued by helicopter. If you decide to stop here for refreshment you should remember that there is still about a third of the route to complete.

After the pub you should follow the road to Postbridge. There is a small downhill closely followed by a climb. The run down into Postbridge is very fast. It can also be quite cold!

Postbridge is a popular tourist stop. Consequently the traffic can be quite busy. On your left, as you cross the East Dart River again, you can just see clapper bridge that all the tourists have come to be photographed on.

After the bridge there is a short climb before you turn left. The signpost directs you towards the Youth Hostel. Continue along this road. On your left you will have very good views of the moor you have just cycled down. Seeing how steep the hill is, you will realise why you were going so fast coming into Postbridge! On your right you will have forest. The road soon drops downhill. The corner at the bottom is a little tricky if you are going full tilt.

At the junction go right. You will pass the Youth Hostel on your right. If you go through the first gate on your left you will be back onto forest tracks. Follow this fast track until you see a turn going back on itself to your right. Take this turning. At the top of the climb



a signpost directs you to turn left (SX 648764). It is unlikely that you will be able to cycle up this very steep and rocky bit.

At the top, turn left and follow the track. You will go through a gate and then follow the grassy track along the wall. This will bring you back to the steep rocky track above Dunnabridge Pound Farm. You should go through the gate turn left and then right, onto the road. The final hill back up to the car-park is quite steep. Once back to the car you can think about visiting the Warren House Inn again...

## **ROUTE SEVEN**

### **IVYBRIDGE CIRCUIT**

#### **IVYBRIDGE-WESTERN BEACON-HARFORD-HANGER DOWN-IVYBRIDGE**

Grade 1. About 7 miles taking about 1 hour. There is a rough off road climb. An ideal training route.

Park in Ivybridge. There is a big pay and display car park near the leisure centre. You may be lucky and find a space on Harford road near the, now closed, London Inn.

The start of this route is the small stone bridge crossing the River Erme (SX 636564). From here go uphill towards the paper mill. Follow the road up the steep hill past the mill and, a bit further up, past the school. At the junction go right and then immediate left. You will then cross the London-Plymouth railway line.

Soon after crossing the railway there is a dirt track off to your right. Take this and follow it round to your left. Once through the gate you will begin a steep and rocky climb. It is loose in places, which makes it difficult to get up. The track twists right and then left before levelling out.

At the top you will come to a gate. Ahead of you is the remains of an old quarry. Above you, on the moor, you can just make out the line of an old railway. This is the 'Puffing Billy' track which used to carry clay and ore from Redlake at the centre of the moor.

You should aim for the track. The bridleway is the middle of three obvious paths and climbs up a grassy slope to the track. When you get to the track turn left and follow the old railway. This is quite rough but the going is hard and fast, no matter what the weather. By some strange law of nature, you will find that there will be a head wind along this track when ever you are on it, what ever the day!

One of the benefits of cycling on old railways is that there are never any hills on them. Instead, you will climb steadily for 10 miles! However, to prove that all rules can be broken, this track climbs quite noticeably as it curves round Weatherdon Hill. Soon, on your right, you will pass Hangershell Rock. Soon after this you will cross the line of standing stones. This is the bridleway.

Follow the stone row down to a boundary stone (SX 655599). At the boundary stone you should turn almost due west and head for Harford. You should be able to see the reservoir on your left. Stay above this. You will almost be aiming for the wood in the middle distance.

Crossing this section of moor is not that difficult. You should keep your height as much as possible, dropping down hill gently. The moor is relatively smooth, but you will come across the odd large rock, so some care is needed.

Eventually you will see the car-park at Harford Moor Gate. This is a popular car-park and you will always find at least one car here. Go through the gate and down the tarmacked road. Going down this hill you can build up quite a speed. Watch out for the blind corners, there is no place to go if you meet a car.

At the junction turn right and go down a short sharp hill. There is a sharp bend to the left just after the road crosses the Erme. Following the road through this very pretty countryside, you will soon pass a farm on your right. Soon after this there is a crossroads, of sorts, where a farm track crosses the road. This crossroads is wooded on the left. It is called Hall Cross.

Turn left and follow the track up through the walled fields and then across Hanger Down. You should aim just to the right of Hanger Down Clump (an obvious clump of trees at SX 622585). Once past the Clump you should aim for the next lot of trees, where you will join a tarmacked road. Follow this road through all the twists and turns and you will come to a T-junction.

At the junction turn left onto the Cornwood-Ivybridge road and head back into Ivybridge. You will shortly go under a railway bridge. Take the next left towards Dinnaton (it appears to be straight on, as the main road turns sharp right). Follow this road, which is parallel to the railway, until you come to the junction at the end. Turn left and then next left.

Following this road you will drop down a steep hill past the church before coming back to the bridge and your car. There are a number of pubs in Ivybridge. The nearest one to this bridge is called, not surprisingly, The Bridge. The beer in here is recommended.

## **ROUTE EIGHT**

### **WHITEWORKS CIRCUIT**

#### **WHITEWORKS-SWINCOMBE-BULLPARK-WHITEWORKS**

Grade 4. This is a triangular route across rough track and wet moorland. There is a river crossing (which makes it a grade 4 instead of 3) and a couple of nasty hill climbs. About 10 miles taking 1¼hours.

Park in a disused quarry, just above Whiteworks (SX 609708). Whiteworks was once a very big and busy mining complex. On the right of the road you can see the ruins of abandoned mine workings. Following the leat downstream, as it contours round the hill towards Nun's Cross, you can see a number of cuts into the hillside. Across the valley, on the other side of Foxtor Mires, you can make out the spoil heaps of more mine workings. I am sure that there would be massive public outcry if these industrial workings were opened today!

From here, cycle over Devonport leat and continue downhill. At the bottom, the tarmac runs into a rough track, as you go through the ruined mine buildings. There is a signpost giving you a choice of way. To your right, a bridleway is indicated across Foxtor Mires. I have only once tried to follow this route... perhaps I went wrong somewhere, but I very soon ended up in the middle of Foxtor Mires. I soon understood why this area is called a mire! It is, I have since learnt, not surprisingly, notoriously boggy.

Following the other sign, straight on, you will go through a gate. Once through the gate follow the track round the hill until you come to a ford across the Strane River. In summer this ford makes a pleasant water splash. In winter you should cross the stream about 20m further down. There is an obvious crossing point via a couple of large stones; if you feel uneasy leaping the stones with your bike on your shoulder, do what I did, throw your bike over and then follow it! (If you do throw your bike over, take care to land it on the side **without** the derailleur on).

Once across the stream you will be in a wet and marshy bit. It doesn't last long and, although wet, is not boggy under wheel. Continue up a steep hill, along a grassy track, to a gate. Go through the gate and follow the path which sticks fairly close to the wall. There is a downhill section which leads into a small water splash. Soon after this you will see a gate on your right.

Go through this and head towards the top of the hill (in winter, there is often a cattle feeding trough here). Once at the top you should bear right and go downhill. The path is a bit indistinct, but appears to follow a collapsed wall. At the bottom of the hill you will cross an obvious grass path. There is a large stone marking the crossroads. Turn right and go downhill a short way before turning left at another crossroads.

The bridleway now follows an old roadway, which was supposedly built by prisoners of the first world war. It has since fallen into serious disrepair! It is so rough and stony, that

it is difficult to think that it once was a rough road.

The track goes through a gate and continues to follow the wall on your right. You will come to a wet part at Cholake Head before beginning a slight climb. On your right you will have a marvellous view of Prince Hall. This climb levels out and soon leads onto a rough farm track. Follow this track, and you will soon make a very quick descent towards Bullpark.

Take care at the bottom of the hill, as you need to turn sharp left back on yourself. You should not go as far as the gate. The junction is signposted. The direction you have just come, is from Hexworthy, the direction you should go in is towards Peat Cot.

This part of the route, to Peat Cot, covers the same ground as part of Route Three. Follow the rough farm track until it stops. You should then go through the gate and follow the blue markers. You will be riding parallel to the wall along a rough grassy path. Soon you will go downhill towards a wet and boggy section. Although there is a small bridge across the worst of it, you are likely to have to pick your way carefully.

Once over the wet bit there is a nasty steep climb to a gate. Above you is Devonport leat. At the gate turn right and aim for the trees at Peat Cot. The leat will be above you on your left. Go through the farm and cross Devonport leat. There is now a rough stony climb to the road. You will probably have to go through a couple of gates before you get to the road, although they are not always shut.

At the road turn left and go down hill back to your car. Once back at the car, the nearest pub is in Princetown.

## **ROUTE NINE**

### **WEST EAST CROSSING**

#### **PETER TAVY-POWDER MILLS-PRINCETOWN-PETER TAVY**

Grade 5!. This is a long and **hard** route across the open moor. It also goes across Merrivale field firing range, so you should check the local press or police for firing times. There are a number of big climbs, a couple of river crossings and a lot of ground to cover; at times you may have to push your bike. About 25 miles taking 5 hours. This is the hardest route in this booklet.

This route should **not** be tackled alone. It is not recommended for the novice. You should also check the weather forecast. If it is horrible weather, this route could be dangerous. I will mention some escape routes. I hope you do not need them. You will also find the section on energy and nutrition at the start of this book a useful part of the planning.

Park near the Peter Tavy Inn or near the church. (I will admit, now, that I start this route from home and cycle the 4 miles to here. This does not make me a hero. It just makes the last downhill bit 4 miles longer for me). Go past the church and take the next right turn (SX 514778). This is the start of a 4 mile climb, which takes you up 300m.

Follow the road over the cattle grid and continue past the houses. The road continues climbing. Ahead you will soon see a rough and stony track going off left. When you first see it, the track looks steep. This is **not** an optical illusion. Take the left fork and follow the signpost onto this rough track. The climb is difficult in places due to the loose rocks and stones under wheel. At the top of this first slog you will be able to rest (if necessary!) in the shelter of a wall.

Follow the track through the walls. As you leave the walled enclosures you will see, ahead of you, White Tor. It looks pretty forbidding, but do not worry; you will not be cycling up it. Well, not all of it.

The rough track now continues across the open moor. It was coming down this section, a little too fast, that I once managed to wreck a (cheap) back wheel. A stone caught a pedal and then shot into the back spokes, breaking a couple. From there it was a long walk home for me...

Soon you will come to Stephen's Grave, at the crossroads of another bridleway (SX 536782). You will have been at this crossroads before, on Route Five. This is your first decision point. If the weather has turned, if there is a red flag flying from White Tor (indicating firing) or if White Tor is shrouded in mist, then this might be a sensible place to get off the moor. If you are going to get off the moor, turn right here and follow the directions given in Route Five.

Soon after Stephen's Grave the stony track turns grassy. The stony track was built for

the military, who use it to get on to White Tor and the firing range. Do not follow the army road as it turns left. Instead continue straight along a rough grassy track.

Ahead you should see a standing stone (SX 551788). Aim for this. At the standing stone there is a bit of a water splash. From here follow the track and aim for the corner of the wall. You should then follow the wall to its far corner. The going is quite rough here. In places the track is badly rutted and eroded.

At the end corner of the wall you should see, down on your left, the circular Pooh's Wood (or South Common Plantation as it is called on the map). In the distance, beyond the wood, you will see the rugged beauty of Tavy Cleave. Ahead you should see nothing, except the open moor. From here on in, you will be truly out on the moor. Or more accurately, you will be in the middle of the moor. Out here there are no signposts to follow nor pubs to visit.

The track bears slightly right and goes down hill slightly. Throughout this route, never be tempted to go down hill too dramatically. Particularly if you have just spent half an hour slogging up it! The track here is an ancient peat track, and as such, is obvious to follow. Continue along this track towards White Barrow. You should take care not to cause further damage going through the eroded bits on this peat track.

At White Barrow the peat track enters a rather deep cutting as you begin to drop down the hill towards the River Walkham. If it has been raining or is wet, this cutting is quite likely to have a small stream running in the bottom. As you approach the Walkham, the ground gets a bit wetter but remains relatively firm under wheel. Cross the Walkham by the ford (Sandy ford SX 574792). Believe me, it **is** easier via the ford than trying to get across by jumping from grass hump to hump. I fell in and got slightly wet, friends who went across the ford stayed dry! At the ford, this cycle route continues along the Lich Way, one of Dartmoor's ancient ways.

Once across the ford there is a small climb (probably pushing your bike) up to the Prison Leat. You will know that you are definitely on the right way if you can cross the leat by using a very picturesque stone bridge. The prison leat provides an excellent escape route if necessary. If followed downstream it eventually reaches the T junction above the prison (Rundlestone). There is a 'phone here (SX 576750).

Once across the leat there is a grass track which climbs slightly. The track is obvious, presumably from constant use. Take care not to cut up the peat going through the small dips.

When the climb has levelled out you will be on Conies Down. The times I have been along here it was slightly boggy. The track remains obvious. You will cross a couple of streams (presumably Conies Down Water) and wet patches. Do not go uphill.

Ahead and slightly to your right, you should see Lydford Tor. To the left of Lydford Tor there is a wall that runs down the hillside. Follow a path which goes slightly downhill. You should aim for the bottom corner of that wall.

Soon you will come to a fairly steep descent to the ford across the Cowsic River (SX 592786). Again, you will find it drier to cross via the ford than trying to cross from stone to stone. On the other side of the Cowsic, the ground is wet and boggy. Turn right and follow the track up a steep hill. It is not easy to cycle up here, mainly because the rocks are loose. I usually end up pushing my bike to the top and then struggling to cycle through the opening in the wall.

Once through the wall, head uphill. You should keep the wall on your left but aim for Lydford Tor. (The map shows the bridleway going to the right of the tor. I have tried both ways and not seen an obvious track. Following the wall is easier, particularly if the weather has come down).

Lydford Tor provides a useful wind break and is an ideal place to stop and take in the scenery. Whilst doing this, I also have a rest, refuel and have a drink. From the Tor you should be able to see your next challenge. You want to be on the other side of the valley, at the same height, near Littafor Tor.

You should be able to see the West Dart River below you and, on the other side of the valley, Wistman's Wood. This is one of the three remaining stunted oak woods in this country. You may also be able to see the head weir intake for the Devonport Leat (SX 608780). Aim downhill for the leat.

Devonport leat provides another very useful escape route. (One I have had to use a couple of times!). If you follow the leat downstream you will go eventually go through Beardown Hill plantation, after which you can pick up the footpath through Bear Down Farm. The farm track crosses the Cowsic (by bridge) and then joins the road, just above Two Bridges. There is a 'phone in the Two Bridges Hotel (SX 607749).

If you are not at head weir, follow the leat upstream until you are. This weir provides a suitable place to cross the river. Either go across the weir or cross via stones further down river. Once across the river, enter the walled enclosure and head towards the top corner of Wistman's wood. From there follow the track uphill. You should eventually come onto a level piece of ground between Longaford Tor and Littafor Tors.

Continue straight on. You will drop slightly and come to an opening in the wall (SX 618774). Go through the opening, do not go over a style. Once through the wall, bear slightly left. You should be able to see a couple of trees in the middle distance. Aim for these. As you go further downhill you will see the trees more clearly. They are surrounded by a lot of clutter. Coming down the path through the rocks makes an interesting descent. Take care!

In the distance you can see a chimney. To the right of this you should see a line of trees. Aim for the chimney. The path here is easy to follow but is fairly indistinct. In places it can be soft.

As you get closer to the chimney you should notice that the path is heading to the right.



If you look carefully, you will see a smaller chimney hiding behind the trees. You are aiming directly for this. Go through the gate and bear slightly right. You will come to another gate, go through this and go down hill to another gate. Once through this gate, cross the farm track and then go over the clapper bridge which crosses the Cherry Brook (SX 628772). The chimney is above you on your left.

Go past the chimney and head towards the bottom corner of the wall. There is an opening here. In the distance you should be able to see the road. Just beyond the road you can make out a disused quarry in the corner of the forest. You should aim for that.

During the summer it may just be possible to get from this opening to the road directly. If it has been wet recently you may find it a different matter! I have found it extremely boggy and have only made one attempt to cross this bit of ground along the bridleway marked on the map. I ended up in the middle of a mire. When I was forced to dismount my bike my footsteps caused the surrounding area to rise and fall very ominously! I got quite wet back tracking.

There seems to be a track that goes the long way round the boggy stuff. Horses had certainly used it the times I followed it, so presumably it is now the bridleway. Although the track does take you the long way round, when it does cross the bog it can still be wet. I did manage to get through without further mishap, but I did have to pick my route with care.

Having crossed the bog, it is simple run to the road. Go through the gate and turn right towards Two Bridges. Just before you leave the area, look back across the moor and congratulate yourself. You have just completed one of the hardest crossings of the moor! The sign on the gate tells you that it was the Lich Way.

From here you have a choice. You can cycle back to Peter Tavy by road or you can cycle to Princetown by road and get some refreshment. From Princetown you can cycle back on the road or take a short off road detour. If you have come this far, you may as well go for the later.

Follow the road towards Two Bridges, then turn right and then left and head towards Princetown. There are a couple of small hills coming into Princetown, but these should seem easy now.

In Princetown you have a choice of pubs from which to seek refreshment. I usually use the Prince of Wales because you can leave your bike outside and still see it. You should use the time in the pub to turn your map the other way up.

A portion of chips and a beer later, leave the pub and turn left on the Princetown-Yelverton road. Just after the cattle grid go off right onto the old railway. You have been here before, coming the other way, on Route Two. I will briefly describe the route again. Follow the old railway downhill. After about a mile and a half there is a steep track off left. Take this and begin a rapid and rough descent onto the other leg of the railway track. At the bottom go right.

On your left you will soon see a sign and a gate. Follow the sign and go through the gate. When you come to the next gate (locked), turn left and follow the path across the field. It is marked in places by blue paint. Soon after crossing a small stream, you will come onto a farm track. Go left and follow the track through a gate. Where the track becomes tarmacked this route leaves that of Route Two. The road then drops steeply to a crossroads. Go right and follow the road on a long downhill. There is then a nasty steep climb to the end of the tarmac. Continue off road and go through the set of gates. You will probably not be able to cycle along here.

Once through the third gate you will probably be able to get back on. Carry on along the track through a beautiful wooded section of the Walkham valley. There is a slight climb to another gate, after which there is a nice downhill section. At the bottom the track turns sharp right across a bridge and then runs through a farm.

There are more gates at the farm. After the final gate there is a nasty loose climb, before you begin a quick downhill over a part tarmacked part rough track. Ahead of you is Merrivale quarry. At the bottom, go through the gate and back onto the road. Turn left.

This is the Princetown-Tavistock road. There is a short downhill followed by a steep uphill. This is the last real climb of the day. Continue on the road, down the steep Pork Hill. Turn right at the crossroads at the bottom, towards Peter Tavy. Follow this road, it goes down another steep hill. Take care, at the bottom there is a sharp bend. Turn right at the crossroads and follow the road. Go right at the end of this road. You will soon come into Peter Tavy and back to your car.

The Peter Tavy Inn should not be too far to walk for further refreshment if necessary.

## **ROUTE TEN**

### **DOUBLE WATERS CIRCUIT**

#### **TAVISTOCK-DOUBLE WATERS-GRENOFEN-TAVISTOCK**

Grade 4. About 7 miles taking 1¼ hours. A number of hard hill climbs. A very pleasant ride along the River Walkham.

This ride takes in some beautiful river valley scenery and is an ideal route to take the week after completing the big West-East crossing of route Nine. Although not on the moor a small part of the route enters into Dartmoor National Park (just). The hill climbs are still pretty impressive.

From Drakes statue follow the Tavistock-Plymouth road towards Plymouth. Take the road off left towards Walreddon, just before Radmores garage. If you need to park, along the road here would be a suitable place. Follow this road past the Industrial units and over the brook. The road turns left and then right. A new Safeways store was opened here in 1993, so the roads around here have been changed slightly.

The road begins to climb Rixhill. This is climb one (of three) which gets very steep just before the top. Following the road straight on, you will soon pass Walreddon Farm on your right, before the road ends at West Down.

Here the road gives way to a rough farm track. Follow this down a steep hill. The track levels out before coming into a slightly wooded area. At the corner you should take the track which forks right. The track to the right goes down a very steep hill and twists round a couple of bends. Follow the track down past the cottages and along the banks of the River Walkham. Go down stream until you come to a rocky outcrop. Go through the gap in the outcrop and turn left. The River Tavy is at your feet.

Ahead of you is Double Waters, so called because the Walkham joins the Tavy here. If the rivers are in spate, the confluence can be interesting, forming a turbulent standing wave. Cross the river by the wooden footbridge and clamber up the bank to the track. To the right the track goes past the old mine workings of the Virtuous Lady Mine (after Queen Elizabeth I, during who's reign the mine was opened). However, this route takes you left.

At the track, go left and continue along the rough stony track. There are a couple of switchbacks to ride up and down here. It is usually wet under wheel, even in high summer, but not often muddy. The rough track soon comes onto tarmac.

On the tarmac you begin climb two. This is steep, long and, I believe, the hardest of the three climbs on this route. It is also on tarmac, so traction should not be a problem. About a third of the way up the hill you will go through a few trees. Just after these trees the bridleway goes left across the down.

The way should be obvious, this track is used regularly by horses. Follow the bridleway up the grassy slope. This climb is not as steep, but, if wet, the clayey mud will make it hard going. As the track levels out you will cross an obvious track going left-right. Turn left onto this track and begin a gentle descent. You will soon come into woods, and begin to drop quicker. The ground starts muddy and soft but very soon becomes a very steep and stony downhill.

This downhill is **very** hard work. You will find it difficult going all the way down. Hopefully, the lessons learnt on previous routes, particularly the rough descent from Older Bridge to Burrator, will come in handy. You will definitely need to have your tyres properly inflated. Take it easy, this is not a race and you do not want to damage yourself or your bike.

At the bottom you will wonder what all the fuss was about. Well you are now, however briefly, in the National Park. You leave it again as you turn left after the river.

Head to the stone bridge over the Walkham. I find this a convenient spot to have a quick drink and take in the view. In the woods about you, there are a number of old mine workings, with spoil heaps, ruined buildings and disused leats very evident. At one time this must have been a very busy river crossing. On a Sunday afternoon it still can be!

Over the bridge turn left. The bridleway is signposted, if you end up going up a steep tarmacked road you have gone too far. Follow the bridleway as it bears right and goes around the house and garden. The path is very narrow here and you are bound to meet somebody along it. Do not go charging round here.

Go through the gate and across a small water splash before beginning a short climb. You now have a long and very rough downhill. If you get this descent right it can be quite exhilarating! As you ride along the river bank you might feel a little precarious. Soon you will see a signpost directing you to follow the track to your right.

This leads you past a crumbling chimney and down a gentle slope. At the bottom of the slope it is usually very wet and extremely muddy. This mud patch has the dubious pleasure of being the first one to trip me up and land me in it, full face. Once through the mud you are again riding along the banks of the Walkham. If you have time to take in the scenery you will find it very pleasant. It is highly recommended very early on a Saturday morning in late spring.

The track soon bears right, away from the river, and heads towards a house. Just below the house you begin climb three. This climb starts very steep and loose. As you get towards the top of this short sharp hill, you may find traction difficult. At the top go left and begin the second third of this climb. This part is also fairly loose but is not quite as steep.

At the top of this part of the climb you will notice, on your left, the steep downhill you went down about 40 minutes ago. Follow the track round to your right and begin to cover the reverse of the first part of this route.

You will find that after the level bit, the track climbs up another short sharp hill. I am always convinced that it was never as steep coming down! On the level again, go through the gate and back onto tarmac.

Follow the road downhill back to the car. The ride down Rixhill is very quick and refreshing. Be warned, if you take the corners at the bottom too quick you may have difficulty. You should also remember that there may be other road users about. Coming down here once, a Transit van nearly wiped me out.

Back at the car you should be able to decide in which of the pubs in Tavistock to seek refreshment. I am sure you will get some funny looks and comments in any of the pubs you choose.

## **ROUTE ELEVEN**

### **SOUTH ZEAL CIRCUIT**

#### **SOUTH ZEAL-LITTLE HOUND TOR-SOUTH ZEAL**

Grade 5. A big climb to start with, followed by open moorland, heading out to the middle of the north moor. Pleasant views, on a nice day! A nice downhill (but difficult) to finish on. About 8 miles taking about 2½ hours.

Park in a lay-by just up the road from the Shell garage in South Zeal (SX648935). Take the left turn towards Ford Farm. Just before the road turns into track, there is a track veering off to the left. Take this track and begin the long hard climb, which will take you from 230 metres to 390 metres in about a mile. The going is pretty tough and is technically demanding.

The track starts off steep and is fairly loose and rocky under wheel. If it has been at all wet recently, the going will also be very slippery. In places you will have to get off and push. Do not worry, just round the corner it changes.

It gets worse. The track now becomes very steep and rocky. The rocks are loose. Cycling up here is a real test of skill. Anyone can slog up a steep hill, not many can slog up a steep hill if they have to fight for balance and traction all the time. (OK, I will come clean and say that I fall into the second category. I do practice though, particularly on this route. Improvements have been seen!).

Half way up this hill you will come to a signpost. Follow the track upwards to the right and continue the long slog up. You will soon come to a gate. Above the gate looms the dominant form of Cosdon Beacon, reaching up another 270 metres to 550 metres. You will be cycling all the way around this beacon, mainly at about 400 metres. This gate makes a convenient drink stop.

Go through the gate and continue the slog up. The track may now be less steep, but is still very loose and technically demanding, as it winds through the walled enclosures. Another gate gives another chance for a rest. Along this track you will cross large drainage channels. Although these look like abandoned leats, they do not connect with the leat further up the hill.

Eventually the slog levels out and finally draws to an end. You leave behind the enclosures and very soon come to an abandoned leat. This is an ideal place for a refuelling stop. The view is also worth a look, whilst you catch your breath. Another track heads off to the left. This goes to the top of Cosdon Beacon only. You should carry straight on and follow the bridleway which runs parallel to the leat.

Although following the leat means that the going is relatively flat; it is still hard going! There are a couple of very wet bits along here. Following the obvious path should get you through without too much damage.

After about an hour (but feels like forever) of climbing (steep and steady) you will eventually come to a down hill section. Before you go hurtling off down this stop and have a look. It is probably a good place for further refuelling as well. In the middle distance you should see a steep tor with a hut on the top. This is Steeperton Tor. You are **not** aiming for this.

In the valley bottom you will see a ford. If you get to this you have gone too far. Instead, follow the hill round to your left. Aim for the ancient enclosures and try not to lose too much of the height you have just sweated blood to gain.

Following the obvious path through the enclosures and contouring round the hill (Little Hound Tor), you will eventually come onto a well used track. Just ahead, you can see a stone circle. I couldn't see the range notice board marked on the map; perhaps you will have better luck.

You should now follow the track back towards South Zeal. You want to bear slightly right. The track looks like a disused leat, but is probably a peat cutting. Cycling along this depression is certainly easier than the climb up. In places it can be **very** wet. If it has been raining recently you will probably find that you are cycling in a stream. Still, that just means that you will not have to wash the bike when you get home!

Eventually the track starts to head down. You will see a stone row ahead. Cycle through this, and follow the track down, veering off left.

Now is probably a good time to stop and have a quick drink of water and a final piece of banana. You will not get much chance again. It is probably a good idea to check your tyre pressures whilst you are stopped.

You now begin a steep and **very** demanding descent. You will find it easier if you are going moderately quick. The going is **very** rough and stony, but it is possible to ride down here safely and to enjoy it. Half way down your legs and arms will begin to protest. A bit further on, your palms will go numb. Your adrenaline level will certainly be raised! This descent is not for the faint hearted, it is certainly possible to ride all the way down. At the bottom you will be exhausted but you will be on a real high!

At the bottom you will meet the road. Turn left and return to your car. In the pub afterwards you should congratulate yourself for completing a tough, demanding and, I hope, very enjoyable ride.

## **ROUTE TWELVE**

### **NORTH-SOUTH CROSSING**

#### **PRINCETOWN-EYLESBARROW-ERME HEAD-RED LAKE-IVYBRIDGE**

Grade 5. This is another long and hard route across the open moor. Unlike Route Nine, this route crosses the south moor and does not enter any firing ranges. There are a couple of river crossings and a lot hill climbs. The final section of the route uses the old puffing billy track. About 17 miles taking about 3 hours.

Although this is an easier route than Route Nine, it should not be tackled alone. This is not a circular route, you should make your own arrangements for picking cars up. Again, it is worth reading the section on energy and nutrition before planning this route.

Start at the car park in Princetown (SX 589735). Leave the car park, turn right and then right again. At the T-junction go straight across, between the pubs, and begin to climb up to south Hessary Tor along the bridlepath. Follow this bridlepath to Eylesbarrow tin mine (SX 598682).

The route along this bridlepath, to Eylesbarrow tin mine, has been described previously for Route Four. As such only a brief description will be given.

The bridlepath up South Hessary Tor is narrow but the path is now hard and fast. There is a very quick downhill, through old mine workings. After these workings the path becomes narrow again as you follow a line of boundary stones. You will soon come to Peat Cot Crossroads, where you should go straight on to Nun's Cross.

The path from Peat Cot Crossroads to Nun's Cross has been improved. Watch out for the drainage ditches. Do **not** try and go round these obstacles.

You will come down a short hill as you come towards Nun's Cross (SX 605699). Passing Nun's Cross you will begin a long and hard climb. Take the path which veers off left. The going is rough and quite loose under wheel. At the top of the climb you come onto a very rough and stony track. This will take you quickly to Eylesbarrow tin mine, via a couple of water splashes. The tin mine is a suitable place to find shelter from the wind and have a quick stop to refuel.

As you go through the tin mine, you should take the track on the left, which almost doubles back on you. This track is another old mine track, it is hard under wheel but in places can be very rough and stony. If it is at all wet, there is likely to be a small stream running down some of this track. Needless to say, the stream flows over the smoothest route!

As you turn a corner you will begin a short descent. This is extremely rough going over the old cobbles. It is hard to think of a time when it was ever smooth enough to take wagons or mine trucks down here.



At the bottom you will go through more abandoned mine workings. Cross a small stream and head up to your right. The path now climbs up a grassy track. As the path levels out a bit, you should see a small path going off to your right. It is an easy path to miss (believe me) as it looks like a sheep track, rather than the bridlepath that you are on.

Take this path on the right and drop down to the River Plym. If you follow the track you are on, you will have gone to far.

Cross the Plym Ford, if you are lucky you will not get wet feet. I usually do. From here, until you get to Erme pits you are on another of the ancient ways across Dartmoor; the Abbott's Way. There is some confusion about whether this section is a path or bridleway, so you should play safe and push or carry your bike.

Once across the Plym, begin to climb the hill. The path is obvious but is not distinct. You are now on the Abbot's Way, which you will follow until you get onto the Puffing billy just below RedLake.

Following the grassy path uphill is relatively easy. The path becomes less obvious as it levels out, but if you continue straight on you will eventually come to more obvious sections. As you get to the top of the hill, you should be able to see the Redlake clay tip. This is a very obvious, dark pyramidal, clay slag heap, which is almost in the middle of the south moor. Do not aim directly for the tip, as this will land you in a very wet mire.

You should also be able to see, at the top of the Erme valley, abandoned mine or quarry workings (Erme pits). From here onwards there is no confusion about the status of the path, so you can get back on your bike. The path that goes through these workings is a bit rough in places, but is rideable with care. You should aim for the Erme ford and cross the river.

Once across the Erme, the bridlepath follows the Erme downstream. As the path contours around the hill, you will have to cross Blacklane Brook (again by a ford) and then Dry Lake ford. The path now turns left and heads up the valley towards Red Lake.

In the middle distance you should be able to see the railway track, as a line cutting across the hillside. Just above the railway, you should be able to see a stone hut. This is an excellent landmark; if you aim for this hut you will follow the bridleway up the valley and onto the railway.

The path up Red Lake valley is rough in places. The drop down the valley side to the Red Lake ford, is quite entertaining. Follow the best path to the ford.

Once across the ford, begin the climb up the valley. It is a bit of a slog, especially going over some old pits. As the railway comes into better view, you will find that the path is once again a good wide track. The final slog onto the railway track is the last one of the day. The railway embankment provides a suitable place for a stop to refuel and have a drink.

On the railway track turn right and follow the railway downhill. The going is very firm under wheel and, as it is mostly downhill, is quick. This section of the route is about six miles long. The railway chippings do give you a pounding, you will certainly notice it before you turn off! The only way I have found to lessen the impact, is to not really grip the handlebars. If you do this you will, obviously, need to take care that you still have control.

Soon, on your left, you will go past Leftlake. This is another abandoned clay pit. The slag heap on the right is not quite as obtrusive as the one at Red Lake. Leftlake provides some of the drinking water for Ivybridge.

Once past Leftlake, the pounding continues for another couple of miles. In the distance you will be able to see Hangershell rock. A few minutes later you will be cycling around the hill below the rock. After Hangershell rock, the track curves round Weatherdon Hill. There is a noticeable downhill once you have come round the hill (an unusually feature for a railway!).

At the bottom of this hill, you will see a grassy track off to the left. Take this track downhill across the bracken. The track ends very near a disused quarry. If you are going quickly do not get caught out, the drop (only about six foot) might do some damage. Leave the moor through Stowford moor gate. This section of the route is the reverse of part of Route Seven.

The track now goes down a very rough and stony descent, taking a right and left turn, before coming to another gate. After the gate turn right, you will soon come to the Harford road. Turn left and descend into Ivybridge.

The road crosses the London-Plymouth railway and then comes to a crossroads. Go straight over the crossroads and down the hill, going past the school on your left and a paper mill on your right. At the bottom of the hill, you will be cycling along the Erme again. Stowford Bridge, 10 metres further on, provides a suitable end point for this route.

Ivybridge provides a number of pubs for refreshment. The Bridge, just round the corner from Stowford Bridge, serves an excellent pint.