

DARTMOOR **TRAIL AND FELL** **RUNNING**

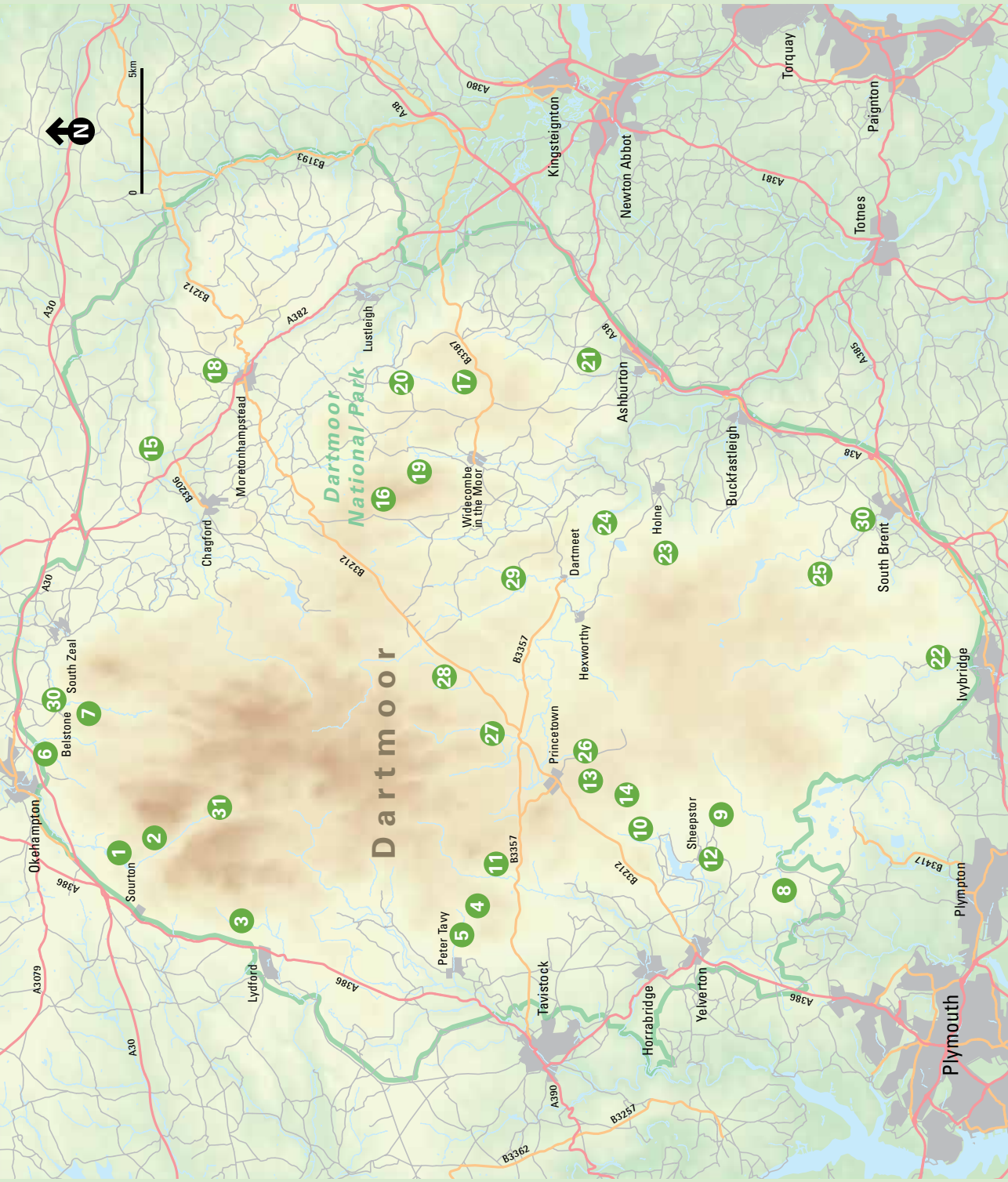


Colin Kirk-Potter

31 GREAT RUNS



START



Dartmoor

Trail and Fell Running

Colin Kirk-Potter



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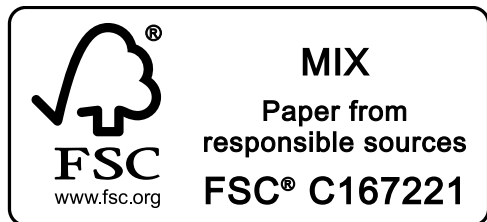
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To my wife Laura, for understanding and supporting
my obsession and passion for running.

About the Author

Colin is the director of Run Venture Ltd, a running shop and café on the western fringes of Dartmoor, and regularly uses his skills as a qualified Mountain Leader and coach to guide runners across the national park. He has an in-depth knowledge of Dartmoor as a runner, walker and as a former Royal Marine (the moor being a favourite training ground upon which to train the elite, combat troops).

He has completed many of the top fell races, including: the self-navigating, UK Mountain Trail in the Lake District, two Bob Graham rounds, the 105 mile Ultra Trail du Mont Blanc in Europe, and numerous mountain marathons which involve running and navigating in remote areas over two days.

This is his first book, although he has written for local publications and national running magazines.



Acknowledgements

Without the Royal Marines I might have never even have set foot on what I believe is the best National Park in the country. The men I served alongside shaped my personality and in a roundabout way influenced the style of my writing. To all, serving, former, and those no longer with us; thank you Royal.

The last word has to be for Laura, aka Mary Poppins. Laura not only understands my obsession and passion, but supports it. When I had the idea for the book, in true Mary Poppins style she told me that with the right amount of imagination, anything is possible. Laura has always provided me with an honest guide to life, with the importance of kindness, responsibility, integrity, and the capacity to enjoy life no matter what.

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AF = Adharanand Finn

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ML = Mark Locket

RR = Rob Richards

SW = Sam Waddy

SQ = Stuart Queen

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Introduction

Dartmoor ... 365 square miles of stunning moorland, largely untouched by the community of local, trail runners, let alone those from further afield! Whereas the city half marathons of Exeter and Plymouth sell out in hours and attract up to two thousand entries each, local Dartmoor trail races average about a tenth of that number. Maybe it is because of its legendary reputation of bottomless, peat bogs and mires. Perhaps it is the remote, rocky outcrops known as 'tors' which can be up to three miles from any civilisation, or a perceived lack of recognisable paths that deter the otherwise avid trail warrior. More simply, it might just be because that despite apps, GPS gadgets and computer software, there has never been a specific, trail running guidebook for Dartmoor.

Trail running is rapidly becoming one of the fastest growing sports in the world; the South West, and indeed the whole of the United Kingdom. There are trail running events in abundance, and their unique selling points are their sense of adventure and the chance to get out of the city and run wild. Dartmoor National Park is such a place, but knowing where to run, which routes take in the best scenery, which parts are not to be missed, is often key to enjoying a run on the trails.

Running on Dartmoor scares some people. That sounds like an exaggeration but, talking to many of the local runners, I find that they are afraid of getting lost, or getting injured – and scared that their tech gadget will show a slower pace than they are used to on their usual road runs!

Running is a broad church and encompasses everything from a 100m sprint to a 100 mile plus ultra, on different surfaces from the rubber crumb of a track to the thin, mountain ridges of the Italian Alps. Jumping out the front door and going for a run around the roads, lanes, city, towns, and villages where



Bellever Tor at dawn (Route 29) – SW

most of us live is easy. It is within our comfort zone. We don't have to think, we can just run and tick off the miles. For many, that is their thing, and I am not one to say otherwise. However, going for a run on the paths, 'trods' (faint, thin tracks often made by animals and / or humans, literally trodden into the ground) and trails of a national park such as Dartmoor, is a different experience compared to that of a road run. Yes, it is still classed as running but it is different. The terrain underfoot is different, the ups and downs are different. The experience is different. It is the same with cycling; where there is road cycling, mountain biking, downhill, stunt, BMX, touring, the list goes on. Yes, they are all on a bike, but different.

So what qualifies me to write this book? I have lived, worked, trained, and raced on Dartmoor for over 20 years, the first 17 years as a Royal Marine Commando. The national park provided the perfect, training environment for the elite unit, then for an international trail running competitor, and more recently in my role as a qualified Mountain Leader and running guide, working from my own running shop and hub on the edge of the moor. I can safely say that I am well acquainted with the Dartmoor trail and fell running scene. Having ran trails on three continents, Dartmoor is still, in my mind, running's best kept secret!

This book, *Dartmoor Trail and Fell Running*, outlines some of the best trail running routes the national park has to offer. Whether it be climbing over the rugged, northern 600m tors, or tearing along an 18th century leat from a Napoleonic prison, this off-road running guide has options to suit all tastes and abilities.

Its aim is to highlight the best of what Dartmoor has to offer for the runner. Whether you are an experienced weather-beaten trail warrior looking to explore a different set of trails, or a lean, mean road running machine keen to mix it up and add a bit of trail work to your training.

The routes included in this guide are not by any means the limit. Indeed, there is an abundance of other routes available, but understanding where to run is often a barrier. This book is just your starting point.

How to Use this Book

This book is only a guide, and although the routes contain a detailed description and a map to accompany them, they are no substitute for a map and compass, and the ability to use both.

I would not expect for one moment that you would take this book in one hand while running full pelt over the tussocks of Dartmoor in the depths of winter, hoping to read the finer details of route choice. Ideally, I would select a route from the book prior to the run, annotate a map and take that. I have known some folk print off the directions I have sent them and carry them in a waterproof map case along with their map or, photograph it on to their smart phones.

The first time you run an unfamiliar route, do not expect fast times compared to those of your usual runs for several reasons:

- Running head down, as if trying to emulate Roger Bannister, will get you lost, as you are likely to miss key junctions. This is trail running and while challenging, it is also supposed to be enjoyable. A more leisurely pace allows you to take in the views.
- The terrain is not uniform and consistent underfoot. This will not only slow you down, but also challenge other proprioceptive muscles which will fatigue you much sooner.
- The gradient off-road is much steeper on the ups and downs. Some of the routes in this book involve uphill sections which most of us are unable to run up, and some of the downhills can only be attempted at speed if you are well practised in this skill. Most running club sessions include hill sessions, but only ever uphill. Downhill training is often neglected.
- The cadence is much higher on trails and fells, and constantly changes which breaks your rhythm, making it more difficult to get into your stride and pace.

Considering the above, it begs the question: why would you want to run on trails and fells in the first place? Because it is much more fun! Give me a jaunt around the trails and fells of Dartmoor any day over the petrol-fumed roadside pavements of a town or city.

There are other aspects which can benefit the avid road runner in the long run. Leg strength is one such bonus, as is a better core and balance from which to power your road running 10k personal best. The repetitive pounding of the tarmac can also cause muscle imbalances and overuse injuries, which can potentially be prevented by incorporating running on a different surface such as a trail or the fells.

Yet the benefits are not just physical. Running in the natural environment is generally accepted to be beneficial for mental health. Just look at any Instagram feed associated with running, or any running shoe marketing campaign and the backdrop will inevitably be one of beautiful, natural surroundings. Dartmoor is a very spiritual place, and its natural environment is used by many mental health charities as



their classroom. Ironically, the charities associated with treating service personnel for mental health issues such as PTSD, use the same training area that, the powers-that-be, used to make them into a soldier in the first place.

The routes in this guide will enable both the fast, competitive runner and the recreational jogger to run on some of the best trails and fells Dartmoor National Park has to offer, and benefit each one both physically and mentally.

The routes are split into two categories: trail (T) and fell (F) and there is a difference between the two.

Trail running can be described as running on obvious paths and tracks, often signposted. The surface is usually well-defined and not too technical (see below for grading and classification of routes). For those new to running off-road, this is an ideal place to start, and I would advise running a few trail routes prior to some of the fell runs described in this book.

Fell running or hill running differs slightly from trail, in that many of the paths are less defined, if there at all. Also, the gradients are often much steeper and the surface much more difficult underfoot. These routes will involve some running off the beaten track, so be warned.

There is an argument, not supported by me, that fell running is a predominantly northern sport. Indeed, the North West in particular is the unofficial home of British fell running, but while Dartmoor doesn't necessarily have the altitude, it definitely has the terrain.

Classification of routes

Please note; this is my own grading system and not an official method. There are gradings for the trail race circuit and the Fell Running Association (FRA) have their own classification based on distance and ascent.

How to Use this Guide



However, I have tried to simplify this purely for the purpose of the routes contained in this book and for Dartmoor National Park. I have also not included height in the classification because, as a rule, these routes are going to involve more uphill than most road runs and generally involve a healthy amount of ascent and descent as per the terrain.

The degree of technical terrain relates to how smooth the path is underfoot. The higher the grade, the more technical or rough the terrain is underfoot.

T1a: Short distance, less than 5 miles with no technical terrain

T1b: Short distance, less than 5 miles with some technical terrain

T2a: Medium distance, 5-10 miles with no technical terrain

T2b: Medium distance, 5-10 miles with some technical terrain

T3a: Long distance, 10 miles plus with no technical terrain

T3b: Long distance, 10 miles plus with some technical terrain

F1: Short distance, less than 5 miles

F2: Medium distance, 5-10 miles

F3: Long distance, 10 miles plus

(Fell running routes by their nature involve a degree of technicality).

Running Safely on Dartmoor

In addition to all the recreational activities that take place in the park, the land is still a place of work and a source of income for many. Beef, dairy, and sheep farming are still abundant on Dartmoor, and due to its open moorland nature, these beasts roam freely across the roads and lanes. Sadly, livestock are lost all too frequently to road collisions, due mainly to vehicles travelling too fast, only to suddenly discover an animal in the middle of the road. Dartmoor ponies, an iconic sight across all corners of the moor, also have particularly poor Green Cross Code skills, and unfortunately congregate close to roadsides in the search for discarded food. Bottom line is, *"take moor care"* (Dartmoor National Park Authority) when driving across the moor.

Live firing ranges

The Ministry of Defence also have three, live firing ranges on the north moor: Okehampton, Willsworthy, and Merrivale. Live firing can take place at any time of year, day and night within these ranges and they are out of bounds at these times. However, they are very rarely used at weekends and not every day of the week. Use the link below to find out in advance when and where firing takes place. The ranges are patrolled by wardens, marked by permanent red and white range markers, and temporary red flags on the surrounding tors. Entering the ranges during firing not only causes major military exercises to cease, it also potentially causes loss of life on both sides and risks a run-in with the law.

To find out which ranges are in use and when, go to the website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/dartmoor-firing-programme.

Each route in this book will inform you if it enters the firing ranges at any point.

In addition to the live firing in these areas, the military does train frequently on other areas of the moor, but only with blank ammunition and then only under certain circumstances.

On any part of Dartmoor, it is not unusual to come across used ammunition ordnance such as smoke grenades etc. While I can assure you that every effort to remove such items is taken, mistakes do happen, and some do get left out on the moor. It is imperative that none of these items are touched just in case of a partial detonation or that the item may still be live. Touching or carrying the item off the training area potentially risks injury and / or death. For more information on this, go to: www.dartmoor.gov.uk/living-and-working/access-and-land-management/military-on-dartmoor.



Range warning sign

Running Safely on Dartmoor

Weather conditions and climate

'Climate' is the term used to describe long-term weather patterns, and Devon's is much like the rest of the temperate climate associated with the United Kingdom, which is influenced by the Atlantic Ocean to the west. However, being situated in the South West and the prevailing weather coming from that direction, Devon tends to catch it first, whether it be fine or wet conditions. So, as a rule of thumb we can probably safely say that the area's south-westerly position makes it generally warmer, yet wetter and windier, than most other parts of the country.

Dartmoor, however, adds a couple of extra factors into the mix. The higher altitude and exposed landscape makes the weather here a little more extreme. There is a general pattern where the higher the relief (altitude), the greater the likelihood of precipitation. Once the damp air is blown up over the granite mass of Dartmoor from the south-west, it cools, producing clouds and inevitably precipitation.

One of the key indicators of the climate on Dartmoor is the distinct lack of trees. Those that remain, such as the dwarf oak trees at Wistman's Wood, and the lone, gnarled tree on the summit of Sharp Tor, are all twisted and bent out of shape. Another, is the fact that there are eight reservoirs located on the moor, providing the South West with one of its most important sources of water. These don't fill by themselves and, according to the Dartmoor National Park Authority, Princetown, in the rough centre of the moor, receives, on average, twice the annual rainfall compared to towns on the south coast of Devon.

The temperature is frequently 2 to 4 degrees lower at the top of North Hessary Tor, at 510 metres above sea level, than lowland woodland on the eastern side of the moor, at less than 200 metres above sea level. A common weather condition of Dartmoor is blanket fog, which rolls over from the south-west making the temperature drop and visibility challenging. In fact, the moor is famous for it. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle based his suspense on the fog in which the Hound of the Baskervilles hid, in his book of the same name: *"In all England there is no district more dismal than the vast expanse of primitive wasteland, the moors of Dartmoor in Devonshire."*

So, what does this mean for us, the off-road runner on Dartmoor?

Check the conditions prior to setting off and match this with your experience and ability. If the weather is bad and you consider yourself a novice with limited local knowledge, then choose a different place to run. Within the route descriptions of this book, I have made it clear which routes to be wary of in bad weather. Dress or carry the right kit for the job. The weather can change in an instant and in a 5-mile run on the tops of Dartmoor I have gone from running in blue skies to full on blanket fog and mizzle. You have been warned. Read the chapter on clothing and equipment to get the guidance and knowledge.

Dartmoor should be classed as a British, mountainous area when it comes to weather conditions, and in particular navigation. There is a saying among outdoor types in the know, which states that, if you can navigate on Dartmoor, you can navigate anywhere. This is due to the lack of key features such as large mountain tops, huge rivers, or a plethora of villages and roads. Please do not underestimate it.

The Countryside Code

This is largely accepted as the rules governing visitors behaviour (including runners) when it comes to using the countryside as a recreational space, and as such, should be adhered to by all. Here is a summary, as per the government guidance, with a few additions from myself.

- Respect everyone.
- Be considerate to those living in, working in, and enjoying the countryside.
- Leave gates and property as you find them; so if gates are closed, close them again.
- Do not block access to gateways or driveways when parking.
- Be nice, say *'hello'*, share the space. Often runners get a bad reputation for head-down ignorance. If coming up on a narrow path behind a walker then call out *'excuse me'* in good time and say *'thank you'* as you pass.
- Follow local signs and keep to marked paths unless wider access is available. Much of Dartmoor is open access land so allows you to roam, but respect private land.
- Protect the environment and take your litter home. Leave no trace of your visit.
- Do not light fires and only have BBQs where signs say you can. Do not use disposable barbecues. They are just that, and so bad for the environment during use and certainly after.
- Always keep dogs under control and in sight. Lambing season is generally in March and April but can be either side of this so take extra care at this time.
- Bear in mind also that Dartmoor is home to birds such as the meadow pipit and stonechat, which build their nests on the ground between the 1st of March and 31st of July. These areas can be found at the following website and it is generally accepted that they be avoided where possible during nesting season: <https://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/wildlife-and-heritage/wildlife/birds/birds-nesting>
- Dog poo – bag it and bin it – any public waste bin will do.
- Care for nature and do not cause damage or disturbance to the natural habitat.
- Check your route and local conditions.



Well-equipped fell runners – ML

Clothing and Equipment

What to wear and how to wear it.

Many of the more experienced off-road runners will either skip this chapter completely or read it with the intention of finding a particular point to disagree with. However, this is only my advice and opinion from many years of learning from my mistakes, learning from my peers, and continually learning as fabrics and equipment develop. Every day is a school day someone once said, so while you are here, read on and you just might pick up something useful.

One of the godfathers of walking on the trails and footpaths, Alfred Wainwright wrote in his 1973 book *A Coast-to-Coast Walk*:

"There is no such thing as bad weather, only unsuitable clothing."

While I agree with him, I would go so far as to change it slightly to: *"and the inability to wear suitable clothing."*

In essence, all we need to wear to run is some loose clothing and maybe a pair of running shoes, or not, depending on which side of the barefoot debate you reside. The multi-million pound sportswear and equipment industry would disagree though, and judging by its ever-growing popularity so would we. Indeed, to run across the high moors of Dartmoor in just a pair of shorts and a gym shirt in most seasons would probably buy you a golden ticket to the back of a Dartmoor Rescue Land Rover.

Yet this is not a chapter designed to encourage you to unholster the loaded credit card and point it in the direction of the nearest running shop. In running, and in particular trail and fell running, less is generally more, and you would be foolish to buy everything listed in this chapter if you didn't run the lengthier distances, didn't run in poor weather, and had no intention of entering any events (which often have a minimum kit requirement so as to meet the governing body regulations, and keep you safe in the event of an emergency).

However, it would be remiss of me not to provide you with at least the bare minimum of kit required for the routes identified in this book, purely from a safety point of view.

Clothing

I started this chapter by adding an extra embellishment to Alfred Wainwright's quote and I reiterate it now; *"and the inability to wear suitable clothing"*, and I should explain this now.

Throughout my career as a Royal Marine, Mountain Leader, and running guide, I have seen people with the right clothing but not necessarily worn for the right weather, and certainly not wearing them correctly. For example, a waterproof jacket is not designed to be worn continuously on a showery summer's day for a four mile run, and the chances are the wearer will get wetter from perspiration than precipitation.

Hypothermia is a real risk all year-round when out on the trails or fells. By its very nature, running off-road takes us into a different environment, away from the relative comfort of towns, and out into less densely populated areas. The weather is an obvious factor in this, but in general, when running, the body's

Clothing and Equipment

temperature is at a comfortable level in cold conditions. However, when we stop, our body temperature reduces quickly, with the assistance of wind, precipitation, altitude and air temperature.

Having to stop is sometimes unavoidable, for example if we twist an ankle, or worse. With no activity to keep us warm, the only protection is from our clothing and gear that we wear or carry. Being left out on the open moor until help arrives, even in the summer months, can cause the body temperature to drop to dangerous levels, and this is when hypothermia can occur, causing a genuine threat to life.

So, before we look at the ranges of clothing, the options available and their limitations as well as when and how it should be worn, remember to wear and / or carry clothing appropriate for the worst case scenario.

Base layer

Let us start with the layer next to the body or skin. The material should be light and of a technical nature rather than cotton. Others might call this wicking material. There are a wide range of options available and with different features, from thumb loops to rear pockets to stash your goodies. The budgets vary as per the brand name and quality. Merino wool, while ace at regulating temperature, can be expensive and too warm in hot conditions.

Personally, I prefer a long sleeve as opposed to short, even on warmer days due to its flexibility when out on the trail. If I am running around a town, at speed, then generally a short sleeve is fine as the town can offer more shelter, and shops, cafés etc. to rush into if a mini ice age should catch you out. Out on the hills, fells, or trails though, shelter is less abundant, as are people willing to take you in and / or call for assistance if needed.

A long sleeve not only provides warmth in the cool but can also keep the skin covered in bright, hot sunshine to prevent burning, sleeves can be rolled up to act like a short sleeve, and more importantly are essential if wearing a waterproof. More on this later.

On the bottom half, shorts or leggings / tights can be worn, the latter providing more warmth, and protection from gorse bushes, rocks and sheep / deer ticks. Personally, I'm a shorts man generally, as I find tights get heavy in the wet, but this is personal preference and the pros and cons of either are obvious. However, many winter fell and trail events require full leg cover, or at least stipulate that they are carried in case of emergency.

Dartmoor, not unlike many other areas in Europe is an area that is blighted by ticks. Ticks can carry Lyme disease and so they are far from desirable. If running through long grass, full leg cover can be useful for prevention of ticks, or a $\frac{3}{4}$ capri-type garment, coupled with calf length socks.

Note: There are many theories about how to deal with ticks from Vaseline to a lit match. However, the safest way, in my experience, is to get a plastic tick remover and deal with it as soon as possible. Get your buddies or someone more personal to you, to check the areas of your body that you can't see on return from your run. Ticks like warm areas such as the back of knees or the groin area, and they crawl!

If you fail to discover one, and after a while experience a bullseye-type ring where a tick may have got hold of you, or flu-like symptoms develop, seek medical attention. Ticks can transmit Lyme disease which is a potentially serious illness, but which can be easily dealt with if treated with antibiotics at an early stage.

When out running, stay in tune with your body. If you feel hot, lose a layer. If you feel cold while running, put on an extra layer sooner rather than later, and before it's too late.

My race partner on the Three Peaks Yacht Race, when climbing the final peak, Ben Nevis, in July, failed to layer-up soon enough as we climbed. We were not moving particularly fast, and the driving snow hampered our speed. With the wind chill factored in, the temperature was well below freezing. Eventually after much cajoling, I persuaded her to stop and add an extra layer, hat, and gloves. By this time, it was a little too late, and it took both of us ten minutes or more to get her dressed. By which time, her core body temperature had fallen to dangerous levels. The steep climb and loads of chocolate warmed her sufficiently to carry on, but this, after four days of racing, could have been the end of our race and, even more dramatically, her life.

Waterproofs vs windproof

First, let me begin by saying, no waterproof will keep you completely dry. Yes, the fabric might be 100% waterproof, but a jacket still has holes for the head and hands etc. and water will find its way in somehow. However, a waterproof jacket will keep most of the wet, and also the wind, out, preventing the body from cooling. A windproof does just what it says, and keeps the wind off but not the rain. The question is, do you need to carry or wear one?

Let us start at worst-case scenario and work back to get a clearer picture. If we are doing many of the trail and fell races in this country and abroad, the chances are a waterproof jacket with taped seams is an essential part of the kit list, and without which you cannot enter. Should they do a kit check that is.

It could be that you end up just carrying it in your pack or bum bag, but as explained earlier, conditions change, and you might have to stop.



Windproof – Inov-8



Waterproof with taped seams – Inov-8

Clothing and Equipment

There are a wide selection of options and brands out there and, in general, the greater the cost, the better the jacket. However, if you are not straying far on your runs, race infrequently and are a fair-weather runner, you probably don't need to buy the most expensive one you can find.

When choosing one, by all means read the reviews, but these are often very subjective and many runners are brand loyal. Better still, get into a store and try some on. Each brand and model fit differently with different body shapes, sleeve lengths and sizes. A size 14 in one brand could be a 12 in another.

Once you have got one on, zip it all the way up to the chin, and into the zip guard. Not doing up a zip on a waterproof jacket is like not putting a lid on a blender. Make sure it's comfortable but most importantly is not too big! This is one of my pet dislikes. Guaranteed – a waterproof jacket that is too big will get the runner wet on a run.

To substantiate my statement let me explain how a jacket that is supposedly 100% waterproof, can let water vapour out. Rainwater falls on to a jacket and should bead off. This happens better if there is perspiration, or evaporated moisture, pushing out from the inside, provided by the runner. As the runner moves, the heat generated and subsequent perspiration, sweat to some of us, is forced out through the micropores of the jacket, keeping the garment dry.

If, however, the garment doesn't fit close to the body, the perspiration comes off the body and, instead of being forced out, cools rapidly and condenses, or turns into droplets, which wet the clothing and skin. In the case of most people who claim their jacket leaks, it is either because they have not zipped it up properly, have bought one that is too big, or have been wearing it running at full-speed in a minor drizzle. Just as with tent material, if skin comes into contact with it, the garment will potentially leak, which is the reason why long sleeves work best as base layers.

Please bear in mind that if you intend to wear a pack over the top, then breathability of the garment is hindered for obvious reasons. Expect to get damp over the shoulders and back where the pack is in contact with your body.

You don't need to test a waterproof jacket by putting your arms up in the air to see if it rides up. No one runs like this, except maybe as you cross the finish line in first place. Exactly. Your arms should move freely, and the hood should cover the whole head.

Just to confirm what 'taped seams' are; look inside a waterproof jacket and look at the stitched joins on the seams. A clear tape should cover all of these to minimise leakage.

Most waterproof, running jackets have a full zip which, in my opinion, makes it more flexible. A smock type jacket may be lighter and more waterproof due to the lack of full-length zip but are more difficult to put on and take off. Again, my recommendation is to go into a store, with specialist running staff, and try some on to see what works for you.

As previously mentioned, a waterproof jacket can help keep you safe in the event of an emergency on the trails, and if heading out for a long run over exposed and remote landscapes, I would always carry one. However, if I am going out for a short, fast run and the forecast is for light rain, I might just take a windproof.

Windproofs are lighter and in general, for most recreational runners, are more than sufficient. They are cheaper too.

These garments should fit like a waterproof, but often don't have a hood. They breathe better than a waterproof and are just designed to keep the windchill factor off. If it rains, you will get wet, but it's the wind that makes you cold. I personally wear a windproof through most of the winter months while running across the moor and carry a waterproof. It means I do not perspire as much and it extends the life of my expensive waterproof jacket, as I rarely use it.

Hats and gloves

Approximately 70 percent of heat is lost through the head (British Mountaineering Council), so a hat is always on the kit list of fell and trail races, and always in my bum bag or pack. I find that if my hands are cold, the donning of a hat keeps them warmer as less heat is escaping from my body. A cap in cold weather is no substitute for a warm beanie. There are lots out there, just go with what works or suits you.



Mitts are warmer than gloves – Inov-8

As for gloves, while the traditional glove aids dexterity when using tech gadgets, they are not as good at keeping the hands warm in very cold conditions. This is generally because each digit does not generate much heat on its own, due to a poor blood supply. Also, the greater surface area of a glove means more heat is lost. Conversely, a mitt keeps all the fingers and hand in one area, sharing body heat. Look at Arctic explorers and check out their hands. All wear mitts and not gloves. Many UK climates do not get that cold, but if you know that you suffer from cold hands for whatever reason, consider a mitt rather than a glove. We are running after all, not climbing, or typing.

Socks

Wow, for something as simple as a covering for the humble foot, who would have thought that there could be so many different options? There are waterproof socks, toe socks, merino, infra-red, mohair, quarter length, ankle, crew, no-show, compression ... the list goes on.

This is such a personal thing; it would be wrong of me to recommend a certain type or brand:

"The book said I should get these socks, yet I got huge blisters and came last in a race ... "

Just try a selection and go with what works for you. What I would say is that on fells and trail, avoid no-show socks, ones that you can't see and only just cover the foot. Debris from the trail can get in the shoe more easily, and you are more likely to get ankle scratches than with a higher, ankle sock. Just my opinion from years of experience. Higher socks may look more like what your grandad wore, but look better than scabby ankles when wearing your heels or sandals.

Clothing and Equipment

Equipment

As well as clothing, there are more items to spend your money on. Some being desirable and others, you might say, are essential. Here we look at some of the options.

To pole or not to pole

Running poles have become more popular in the last twenty years or so, although more so on the continent than over here in the United Kingdom.

On long events such as ultras of over 50 miles, they can be extremely useful, depending on the terrain. I had never used them prior to my UTMB, and borrowed a pair solely for the purpose of this event. My previous fell events and British ultras either forbade their use or they just were not suitable. Poles on soft ground are not an asset, believe me. However, I failed to practice with the poles and only started to feel the benefit of them for the last few miles, by which time my arms were more trashed than my legs.

To that end, if you do intend to use poles and think they may be useful, be sure to get some instruction and practice well in advance.

For the routes in this book, I very much doubt that poles would be required, other than on the north to south crossing.

Safety bits and pieces

Most events now require a whistle, first aid kit and an emergency blanket, and for good reason. Personally, on a long, remote run, I would take an emergency bivvy bag or similar. A phone could also be useful.

Running pack or waist bag

In general, the further you run, the more safety kit you will probably want to carry, so go for a pack rather than a bum bag. Bum bags can carry mandatory Fell Running Association (FRA) kit, but, if inexperienced I would recommend taking more.



Bum bag for essentials – Inov-8



Running vest or pack – Inov-8

Some folk love a hydration system, involving a bladder and tube, over a soft flask or bottle system in the front. I prefer a front, soft flask system for ease of refilling, and regulation of hydration, i.e., it's easier to see how much you have drunk or have got left over a bladder. Soft flasks are easier to clean too.

Again, it is not for me to recommend one or the other when it comes to brands, just go into a physical store, try some on and, if necessary, get fitted properly.

When it comes to size of packs, or capacity, there are a couple of things to bear in mind. If you never intend to run more than a few miles, up to ten say, then all you need is 3 to 5 litres capacity. Most bumbags are 3 litres and are sufficient. However, if you are on the slower side and likely to be out for longer, then probably carry more in the way of food, fluids and clothes. So maybe a 5-litre pack would be better.

If you are considering racing at the front end of races, then go smaller, as weight obviously matters. Just ensure you have enough space to carry the required kit.

For those on half to full-day excursions or longer, then I would say that 10 litres is a minimum size pack to ensure all food and kit can be carried. Of course, if stopping at checkpoints or villages on the way, you might not need to carry as much but do not rely on this. Checkpoints could be poorly stocked, and shops could be closed.

If more kit is required, consider taking a 5 to 10-litre pack plus a bumbag of 3 litres. This gives greater flexibility and is more cost effective than buying a different pack for all eventualities.

Note: at this point I should mention that I wouldn't recommend drinking from water sources on Dartmoor without sterilizing. Unlike the mountains of Scotland for example, the moors are relatively low-lying and sheep roam everywhere.

Footwear

I purposefully left this until last as this is always a hot topic, particularly more recently with a model of shoe for every surface. Back in the day, you had road shoes or a studded shoe, or boot. Advice for what shoe one should wear for this race, or that surface is free online, and in print, with everyone having an opinion.

"My hairdresser says that this shoe is great as they wear them, so I would like the same too." is a phrase I have heard not once but three times in store.

To that end, I am not going to tell you what shoe to wear, as like our feet, each shoe, model, and brand are different. I obviously have my own opinions on what I think works best and, thanks to experience, I believe I can make an informed decision, but it is still only an opinion. However, there are a few things to take into consideration when choosing a running shoe. After all, this is perhaps the most important part of your running equipment.

- Go into an independent running store. These are normally owned and operated by runners of all standards and abilities and can offer you the best advice. Not only that, but you should also be able to try on a wide range of shoes for your chosen surface and running style. Trying the actual shoe on is far better than reading or watching numerous reviews or taking recommendations from your hair stylist!



- Try lots of shoes on. Every brand sizes differently, have different last widths and shape.
- In general, a road shoe has a flat outsole, to give as much contact with the ground as possible for better grip, and a light, soft upper for comfort and speed. A trail shoe has a more robust upper to deal with rougher terrain, and in general a more aggressive outsole to grip on rocky and uneven terrain. A fell shoe tends to be closer to the ground for a better feel of the ground, for balance purposes, and a series of rubber studs to sink into the mud and grass. Conversely, these are less appropriate for the road as there is a lack of contact with the ground, and the studs will degrade quicker.

To that end, you should choose the most appropriate shoe for the majority of the surfaces you are going to run on, your own ability, running style and the level of comfort that you are used to.

For example, I prefer a studded shoe on most off-road surfaces as it is what I feel comfortable in, can trust on all surfaces and I like to feel the ground, like a ballet dancer ... I wish!

I am also relatively quicker on fells than I am on road. To that end I play to my strengths and use a shoe with lots of grip to maximise my skill and advantage. In the USA they would call this a power-play.

- Reviews are useful, but the reviewer has not got the same feet or running style as you.
- Rotate your shoes. It is false economy to have one pair of shoes that you use for everything. By having two or three pairs of different types, the shoes will last longer. For example, as a massive running shoe geek, I have a shoe for all occasions. I have a pair of



racing fell shoes, a pair of training fell shoes (both studded and low profile to feel the ground), a pair of racing trail shoes, a pair of training trail shoes, a pair of hybrid road to trail, a pair of road racing shoes and a pair of road training shoes. Hey, it is my sport and all together those shoes are still cheaper than your average bike.

- Cost. It is what it is, running shoes are expensive and if, like me, you run anything from 20-50 miles a week, it won't be long before they need replacing. However, the expense is relative compared to a new bike which requires a service, new tyres, brakes etc. The average ladies' haircut is more than half the price of a new pair of shoes, so suck it up or choose to run barefoot, or choose another sport.

Waterproof or not waterproof?

My advice is to avoid waterproof running shoes for a number of reasons.

Firstly, a waterproof running shoe is only as waterproof as it is high. If water goes over the top of the shoe, water will not only get in, but it won't get out either. Wet feet for the remainder of the run. On the routes in this book, there is a definite risk of water going over the top of the shoe. You want water to get out quickly if it gets in. A boot is different, as it is higher.

Secondly, feet sweat, and you are just as likely to get wet feet from perspiration, as you are water from outside.

Thirdly, the waterproof membrane makes the shoe more expensive, more likely to fail over time, and a snugger fit due to the membrane. Size up if you must choose a waterproof running shoe.

Waterproof shoes are great for dog walks or commuting to work, but for trail and fell running get used to wet feet. You could consider waterproof socks, but again, perspiration is an issue unless it is very cold.



North West

Dartmoor National Park has so many different characteristics and this is defined primarily by Mother Nature. The relief, rivers, vegetation and relative occurrence of all of the above strive to carve a different personality for each region, and the human settlements, old and new, have only added to this.

The North West can be easily described as the wild and rugged quarter of the moor, with its high tors and steep valleys. The prevailing westerlies mean this side bears the brunt of any bad weather. Indeed, in 1644 after King Charles I visited the town of Tavistock on the western edge of the moor, when asked about the weather in England he said:

“if it is raining anywhere in my kingdom it will be raining in Tavistock.”

The main towns from which to plan these excursions from are Okehampton on the northern tip of the moor, and Tavistock over to the west, just outside the national park boundary.





Langstone menhir (just off Route 5) – SW



Meldon Reservoir

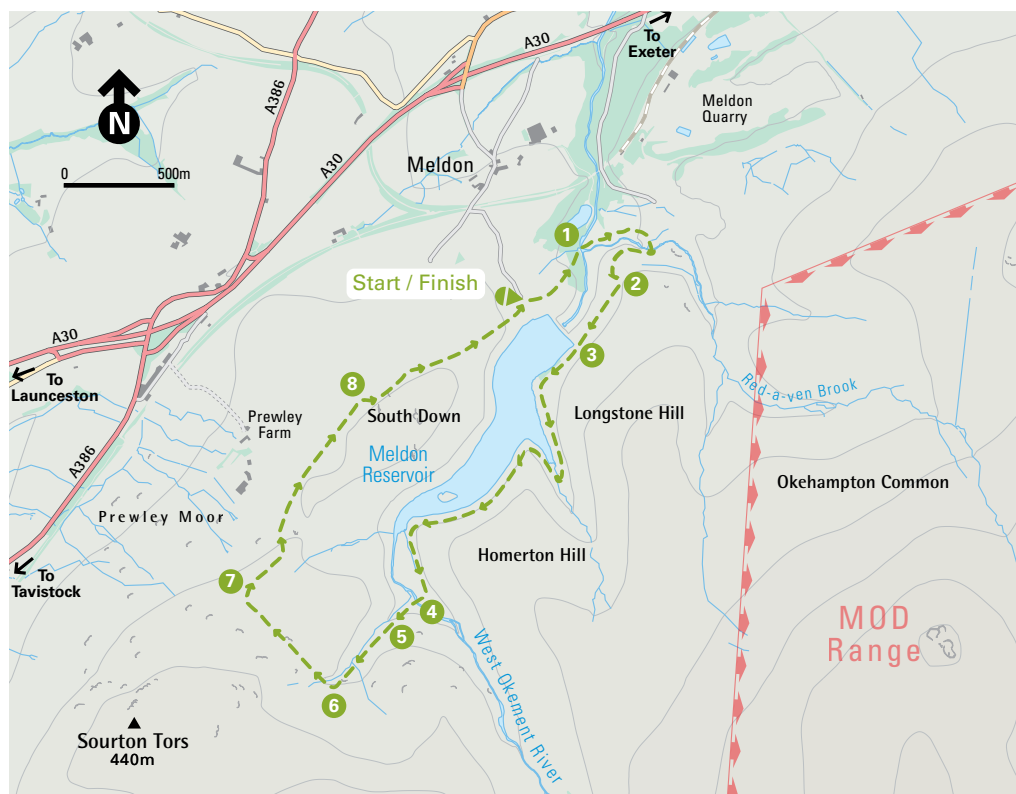
1 Meldon Reservoir Loop

Distance	7.2km (4.5 miles)
Ascent	194m (635ft)
Grade	T1a
Start / Finish	Meldon Reservoir car park SX 562 917 (50.7078 -4.0386)

This route is an easy one to follow, does not take long and does not enter the firing range. It is perfect as a stress reliever where all you want to do is run, without concentrating too much. I have used this run as a mid-commute break while driving on the main A30. Looking up at the moor from my car, the last place I want to be is on the road, but when short of time, I can't venture off too far or for too long, this quick fix is perfect.

It's also a great run for those new to the moor and who want to experience the national park, without going too far off the beaten track. The route follows paths and tracks and has the navigational advantage of having a large reservoir as the centre piece.

Meldon Reservoir has a roomy car park to start from and is administered by the National Park and, just as important, has a loo. There is a charge of £1 for three hours which is enough for those running without picnic or swim stops. There is no café, however, there is a service station just off the main A30 five minutes drive away, and the town of Okehampton is only 3 miles to the north. That said, the banks of the reservoir are an ideal spot to munch a sandwich or two after this run as the views are stunning.



This route can be run either clockwise or anticlockwise, but I have chosen this particular way so as to finish on a downhill, as per a request from my wife who insists this finishes the run with a smile.

Route

Turn left out of the car park and follow the river downstream to a bridge. Cross, and turn right to ascend the other side of the valley along paths and tracks to run a clockwise circuit of the reservoir.

Detailed directions



START

From the car park climb the steps by the loo and turn left on the lane at the top. Turn immediately left through a gate and descend a broad gravel track. Bear right at the open field to access a footbridge on the right at the bottom opposite a large pool.

1 Cross over, and follow the track as it bends right then left up to some old quarry buildings. Turn right in front of one large building to cross a river and follow the track around to the right of the old quarry. The path now bears left and starts to climb steadily with the view of the dam dead ahead.

2 Take the right fork on a thin path (not shown on the OS map) and after a while the gradient eases. The path heads straight up to the left-hand edge of the dam and meets a gate. Go through and head straight on. Do not cross the dam.



Meldon Reservoir with Black Tor in the distance

3 Follow the flat track, past a picnic area on the right by the banks of the waterside, and as the path bends left, ignore the sharp left track going back on yourself, go straight on following the public footpath sign. The path handrails the side of the reservoir, and then turns sharp right to cross a footbridge by some trees. Follow the path up, right and then left, around the perimeter.

4 The going is good here, if slightly uphill before meeting the upper southern edges of the reservoir by some open marshland. The first bridge on the right is closed, so follow the inlet of the West Okement River to a concrete weir, and cross here.

5 Once across, turn right and follow the path up. The path then turns steep left up a re-entrant or valley on the streams left-hand side – keep on this to the top. A sign on the other side says no access so this is the only way around.

6 At the top, the path typically seems to disappear due to the ever-changing wet boggy terrain. However, bear right to cross the stream by a wall corner, and pick up the path again. The path follows the line of the wall on the right, so follow this as it continues along a dry, flat portion of moorland. At the corner, turn right and follow the path to a gate.

7 Go through the gate, now on the West Devon Way, and follow this broad track sandwiched between two



Meldon dam



West Devon Way



Rough Dartmoor wall



walls. Just before a gate, the path forks although this is not obvious. Follow the wall round to the right, slightly uphill, to pick up the right fork which handrails the wall on the left. The path then descends along a thin line of trees and the reservoir again comes into view on the right.

8 Follow down to a gate, cross the lane and head back into the car park.



3 The Great Links Flyer

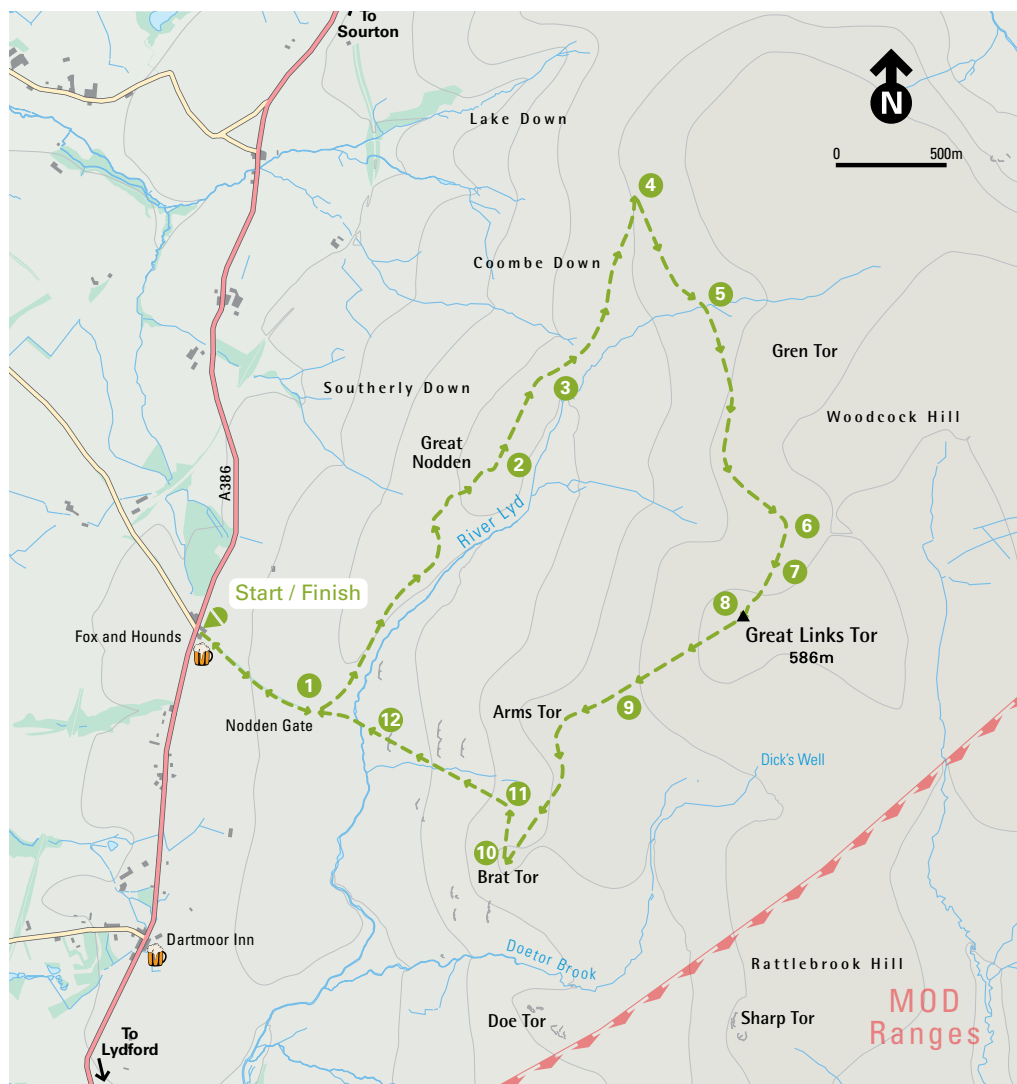
Distance	8.9km (5.4 miles)
Ascent	330m (1,082ft)
Grade	F2
Start / Finish	Fox and Hounds pub SX 525 866 (50.6610 -4.0879)

This side of the moor has some great views out to the west and north, over the mass of Devon that isn't part of the National Park. However, when driving up the main road to the west of the moor it is the high tors and moorland slopes that call the keen adventurer to don a pair of running shoes and explore.

This route, while taxing, dips into the moor and its high-threatening moody character, only briefly. It therefore gives the runner the experience of the drama of the moors, while not actually venturing more than a mile into its heart. Indeed, the first hill is not even part of the same granite, igneous batholith, which dominates the National Park, and as such, has a different and friendlier feel.

The route climbs steadily for quite a while and is relentless, but not unrunnable, following the route of an old railway and military road. Those that persist are rewarded by an invigorating descent back to the start. Great Links Tor on the route is the highest point, and an outstanding example of a Dartmoor tor, quickly followed by Brat Tor with its high concrete Widgery Cross on top.

This run does not encroach on to any firing ranges, but being on the west side of the moor, can be clouded in mist and poor weather at a moment's notice. If this happens, just head west, back from where you came until you hit the road.



Route

From the pub car park, head up the track towards the moor. Turn left after the gate and head north on a track. Turn right at a Y-shaped junction, before turning right again and south to ascend the tor. Follow across two more tors to the south before turning back west, over the river and back down the track to the pub.

Detailed directions



START

Parking at the Fox and Hounds pub, with the kind permission of the owners, take the track between the buildings heading up the slight incline away from the main road. This is a great warm up

before meeting a wooden gate. Go through the gate and stay to the right of the bunker-type feature on the left, following the wall on your right.

① The track, an old peat railway, now swings left and the gradient steepens slightly. The ground is good and easily runnable as the rounded hillside of Great Nodden comes into view. As the track veers left slightly to enter a shallow cutting, a grass trod on the right, accessed by the steep bank, leads directly to the summit and is easy to follow as the gradient steepens. If you don't fancy the climb, stay on the old railway which lazily skirts the edge of the hill and brings you out in the same place.

② The keen hill climbers among you will find a small cairn on the summit of Great Nodden and views over a much different landscape to the west. A view over to the right at the top, shows the highest summit on the run, Great Links Tor.

③ Descend the spur off the hill to the north on gentle ground and an obvious path, to rejoin the main old railway track. Turn right to cross a makeshift bridge over a small stream and continue as the track still climbs, albeit gently, and bears left. Numerous trods veer off the main track on both sides but ignore them and stay on the well-worn and well used surface.

④ The track, as it flattens out, ends in an upside down Y shape, and a track comes in from the right. This must have been the point where the train would reverse rather than do a three-point turn. Turn right on this track, almost back on yourself, and continue uphill with views over to the previously visited Great Nodden on the right, and the River Lyd.

⑤ The track drains well, with a small stream on the left and despite the uphill gradient, is not unduly taxing. The route crosses the young River Lyd, a good spot to cool off the dog in warm weather, and continues to swing left, as it approaches the northern flank of the next tor. (Note that a left-hand fork in the track after the ford marked on the OS map does not exist on the ground.)

⑥ The track straightens now and just before it enters a shallow cutting with peat either side, and at ninety degrees to the summit of Great Links Tor on your right, a couple of large boulders mark the point at which to leave the hard surface to the right and go bog-hopping. **Note:** if you reach a concrete line in the path (to assist drainage) only a few metres past this point, you can still turn right and join the faint track ahead.

⑦ The path now takes a different feel. The line is well trodden, the way obvious and straight, but depending on season, has varying degrees of softness. Either go hard and fast and leap the small brooks, hoping for good ground, or tread cautiously, picking your way over the drier sections. Either way, this is only for a short while, 150 metres or so and the ground becomes firmer as you start the climb.

⑧ An obvious trod leads up and right of the tor, and the trig point on the top of Great Links Tor is easily gained without too much fuss. The views, with the British weather's permission, are too fantastic to describe here.

⑨ From the original approach to the summit, bear right and head westerly to cross the small plateau and reach a small outcrop. A path leads west and straight over, down from this on good, fast ground heading to another lower tor, called Arms Tor. Look over to the left and south now as you descend, to see another tor which looks as if it has a cross on it. It does, and this is to be our final tor.

⑩ Upon reaching the granite-strewn boulders and crags of Arms Tor, turn left to follow a well-defined grass trod, which contours around to the right and over to Brat Tor, slowly losing height as you run along it.



Climb to the top from this side to reach the large cross and spy the river below. Over to the right, upstream, is Nodden Gate, the gate you came through at the beginning and this is where you need to head for.

11 Turn right from the summit to face north, towards Arms Tor, and head to a large boulder. A few faint trods now lead down into the gully below and bearing left, letting the slope take you, cross a small stream before making your way over to the ford through low gorse bushes. Great Nodden should now be obvious over to the right ahead on the other side of the valley. Don't worry if you bear too far left, as when you hit the river, you simply turn right upstream and make for the ford.

11a In poor visibility, just head straight down from the tor to the river and turn right to head upstream, until you reach a ford. If you come to a footbridge first, ignore it and carry on upstream for a short while until you see a ford, criss-crossed by paths.

12 Cross the low ford, and carry on uphill on a solid track, with a wall over to the left marking farm pasture. A path handrails the river on its left but ignore this and head straight on and up.

13 Upon reaching the top of the slope, the gate near the beginning of your run comes into view down the track in front, as you follow the wall on your left. Pass through the gate and down the track, back to the start.