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Yes Tor and High Willhays

Starting point and OS Grid reference	Meldon Reservoir Car Park (Donations box) (SX 562918)
Ordnance Survey map	Ordnance Survey OL 28 - Dartmoor
Distance	6.1 miles
Traffic light rating	

Introduction: This Dartmoor walk to Yes Tor and High Willhays takes place to a large extent across the Oakhampton Military Firing Range but do not let this put you off. Walkers are welcomed when the range is not being used and to avoid disappointment, a freephone number (0800 458 4868) is available, which has a recorded message giving availability. Availability can also be checked at www.access.mod.uk.

For anyone unfamiliar with firing ranges, they are not awash with unexploded munitions. The army military clear up after themselves. Obviously if you do exceptionally come across anything untoward, do not touch it and report it.

Yes Tor was for years thought to be the highest summit on Dartmoor until piped at the post by its companion High Willhays, thanks to modern surveying methods. Yes Tor is 2031ft (619m) and High Willhays is 2037ft (621m). Yes Tor is the one with the trig. point however.

The walk also follows routes which are undefined on the OS map. Some is over open ground and although well walked, feet have not always followed the same paths, so worn routes have not been created. With that in mind, it is worth remembering that one should not venture on to open moors without a compass and the knowledge to use it. If the mist comes down, orientation could become difficult. I have given some relevant compass bearings.

For those using my GPS route, this is based on the track recorded automatically as I walked so should be accurate.

The views from Yes Tor and along the ridge to High Willhays are very good and the West Okement River valley you follow back to Meldon Reservoir is very pretty.

The walk starts from Meldon Reservoir. Construction of the dam started in 1970 and was completed in 1972. The reservoir covers some 57 acres. To get there, take the B3260 south west from Okehampton. Take the turn off to Meldon and follow the signs for the reservoir car park.

Start: From Meldon Reservoir car park (SX 562918), climb the steps next to the toilets and through the gate turn left to the reservoir dam. Cross this and turn right, following the broad track by the reservoir.

The track splits by some picnic tables next to the water (SX 562913). Take the left fork. The track becomes grassy and wide and there are shallow vehicle ruts. The track eventually becomes more stony and bends round to the right.

When the track splits, take the left fork, walking parallel with the little valley to the left.

At the next fork (SX 568910), go left again.

The path now starts to get very faint and to the left are the red and white poles which mark the boundary of the Oakhampton Military Firing Range. Branch off to the left (SX 570905). You now need to be guided by the large rock close to the top of Yes Tor (see photo) which will be ahead of you. From where you have branched off, the compass bearing is 101° magnetic (unadjusted for magnetic variation) to the summit.



The "Target Rock" Near the Summit Of Yes Tor

There is no clear footpath here just pick the best route you can. There was the very faint sign of previous passage to begin with, when I did the walk but I would not guarantee its presence long term.

As you get closer to the top, there is a boulder field just before the large rock. Work your way to the right of this initially until, as you get higher up (from SX 578902), a relatively clearer route through the boulder field becomes clear. You need to head for the left hand side of the large rock.

When you get to the large rock, there is a large pile of stones ahead. Head to the left of these and you will see the rock outcrops of the Tor proper. Head for these and you will soon catch sight of the trig. point and a radio aerial.

There are 360° views from the summit.

Continue from the trig. point heading fractionally west of south (205° magnetic) on the obvious track to High Willhays. There is a large cairn marking its summit.

For the return from Highwillhays, once again there is no distinct path. If visibility is clear, you should have no difficulty in orientating yourself but just in case, head just north of west (281° magnetic). As you get to the edge of the plateau, you will see three rocky outcrops below, which overlook the valley with the West Okement River running through it, which feeds the Meldon Reservoir. Head for the right hand outcrop which is Black Tor.

Descend to the right of Black Tor to the riverbank and turn right to follow the path along the right hand riverbank.

The path diverts briefly around a walled area which protects some plant (water abstraction or whatever) but soon returns to the riverbank.

Stay on the right hand side of the river, in particular ignoring several bridges, until you reach the reservoir, then simply follow the path round its right hand side back to the car park.

