



Walk 14

IVYBRIDGE POOLS CIRCULAR

The town of Ivybridge has a wonderful secret – a series of delightful pools above an impressive gorge, shaded by the magical majesty of Longtimber Woods.

It's worth starting your walk with a brief pause on the original Ivy Bridge, watching the River Erme wind its way through the gorge, racing towards its destination at Mothecombe on the coast. The town of Ivybridge owes its very existence to the river and the bridge, which dates back to at least the 13th Century. While originally only wide enough for pack horses, the crossing meant that the town became a popular coaching stop for passing trade between Exeter and Plymouth. Interestingly the bridge is the meeting point of the boundaries of four parishes – Harford, Ugborough, Ermington and Cornwood.

The river became a source for water-powered industry and by the 16th century there was a tin mill, an edge mill and a corn mill known as Glanville's Mill (now the name of the shopping centre where it once stood). These mills were later joined by a tucking mill for cloth-making and two paper mills, and just before you enter the woods you'll pass the rear entrance of the old Stowford Paper Mill dating back to 1862. The mill used to produce very high quality paper, used for writing, as well as the production of bank notes, but sadly closed in 2013.

Entering Longtimber Woods is truly magical, as you instantly find yourself overlooking the River Erme as it tumbles through the ravine below the old millworks and the grottos it has carved, known as the 'doglegs' by canoeists. Don't be tempted to swim here though - far better treats await you above the spectacular viaduct that will soon come into view. Passing under the towering industrial structure and past a pool ominously known as Danger Wall, you'll discover pillars which once carried the original

INFORMATION

DISTANCE: 3.5 miles

TIME: 2-3 hours

MAP: OS Explorer Dartmoor OL28

START POINT: Harford Road Car Park (SX 636 562, PL21 0AS) or Station Road (SX 635 566, PL21 0AA). You can either park in the Harford Road Car Park (three hours maximum parking) or on Station Road near the entrance to Longtimber Woods, by the Mill, where there is limited free parking

END POINT: Harford Road Car Park or Station Road

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: Ivybridge has a train station on the Exeter to Plymouth line. The X38 bus connects the town to both Plymouth and Exeter

SWIMMING: Lovers Pool (SX 636 570), Head Weir (SX 637 571), Trinnaman's Pool (SX 637 572)

PLACES OF INTEREST: Stowford Paper Mill, Longtimber Woods, Ivybridge Viaduct, Hanger Down

REFRESHMENTS: The Riverbank Café in Ivybridge has a great position overlooking the Erme, where you can watch and listen to the river babble by (01752 698576, PL21 9PS). There are several pubs in the area but if you want something really special, and are prepared to splash the cash, the Treby Arms in nearby Sparkwell, which has one Michelin star, is a real treat (01752 837363, PL7 5DD)

wooden viaduct, built by Isambard Kingdom Brunel to become part of his impractical atmospheric railway. Take a slight deviation to the right of the main path, and about 50 metres upstream you'll find the far more romantically named Lovers Pool, popular with local youngsters who enjoy jumping into the long, deep swimming hole.

Carrying on upstream another 150 metres you'll find a much sunnier pool known as Head Weir ② and the former intake for the paper mill on the opposite side. A footbridge once crossed the river a little downstream from here, although today the only way to cross it is to take a dip. And why not? This is a wonderful swimming spot with a small bubbly waterfall at the top end, and a small rock island in the middle, crying out to be conquered. This stretch of water is popular with grey wagtails and dippers of a feathered variety, as well as an abundance of fish.

Talking of wildlife, this track besides the river was once a drovers' road to and from the moor and you'll spot the walls of several old animal pounds to your left. You'll also spot the remains of an old overgrown swimming pool, adapted from an old reservoir. This was apparently once popular with children, before being commandeered by American troops for training exercises prior to D-Day. The soldiers even apparently carried sand to the pool to turn it into a beach for themselves and the youngsters of Ivybridge. Salute their courage before continuing along to a fork in the path that leads to a riverside picnic spot.

This stretch of the Erme is the watery grail for swimmers in the area – the simply enchanting Trinnaman's Pool ③. A rather dark Dartmoor legend tells how the pool once took the life of a murderous butler called John Trinnaman, but

innocent wild swimmers should be safe. Another legend concerns the ghost of a white bull who roams the woods around here. Whenever the creature appears, a death is supposed to be about to occur in the family – but we can't help but think it's a load of bull!

Enter the circular pool near the tree trunk and the old tinnerns' mortar stone, and enjoy a refreshing swim upstream against the current. The pool is fed by a wonderful little waterfall that creates a natural jacuzzi below, and is framed perfectly by overhanging trees to create an idyllic scene that even the most talented of artists would struggle to conjure up from their own imaginations. Above the waterfall, there are even more treats waiting to be discovered. Zulu (again named by kayakers) is a long and narrow 'Cresta Run' of a pool, with almost unnaturally straight sides and fed by yet another small waterfall. It's perfect for some wet-suited 'whooshing' during the winter months.

The path pulls away from the river into Pithill Wood, before you climb up a set of steps and bend back on yourself to follow a higher path with glimpses of the moor through the trees. Soon the eerie silence is broken by the babble of the Erme below as you continue through the lush woodland, with light glinting through the canopy above. The path is suspiciously quiet and you'll discover why if you continue straight on at the next sign post. This path gets really wet and muddy at certain times of the year, and we found ourselves climbing up onto one of the banks above (where it was much dryer) to continue the adventure. Look out for the remains of old quarries along the route, which gave Pithill its name and provided building materials for the town.





Eventually you come out onto a lane near Pithill Farm. While you can continue straight back down to the viaduct, we'd recommend turning right through the metal gate and up onto Henlake Down 5. The route circumnavigates the gorse-covered down, with breathtaking views up onto the open moors and further on right down to the coast and the sea. Once you have walked up past the silver birch, pause on the railway sleeper bench for atmospheric views right up to the granite outcrop at Western Beacon.

As well as trees crying out to be climbed, the down also hides prehistoric remains and once even boasted a racecourse. The track was created by the Rogers family, who were the principal landowners in the 18th century. Indeed Dame Hannah Rogers even left a £10,000 legacy in 1767 to set up a school in Ivybridge that is still running today. The Dame Hannah Rogers Trust supports children with often profound disabilities, and remains very much at the heart of Ivybridge.

Eventually you will return to the lane that takes you back under the viaduct down to the Ivy Bridge. There is a tiny entrance just before the viaduct on your right that will take you up to where the old platform of the railway was, if you have time and are feeling curious. It's then back over the bridge and to the car park, where you can't have failed to notice a large piece of equipment we've heard described as both a giant snail and a huge vintage hair dryer. There's no sign to explain what it is, but as you might have guessed it's actually a water turbine that was once installed at the corn mill. By day the 22 foot water wheel powered the mill and by night this turbine produced electricity for Ivybridge itself. Another graphic reminder of how important and intertwined the river is in the history of this town.



DIRECTIONS

1 From the car park, walk up Harford Road, turning left to cross Ivy Bridge. Then turn right up Station Road and past the old entrance of the paper mill, entering the woods on the public footpath. Note there is some free additional parking here. Follow the river upstream and under the viaduct. Turn right straight after passing under the viaduct and down to the river for an optional swim at Lovers Pool.

0.5 miles

2 From Lovers Pool carry along the main path another five minutes to reach a second possible swimming spot at Head Weir. Continue along the path looking out for the old stone gateposts and walls of the former reservoir/swimming pool. Just past the next public footpath sign, turn right down to the river by the notice board and picnic table, and you will shortly find Trinnaman's Pool by which is a large tree stump and an old tinner's mortice stone.

0.3 miles

3 From Trinnaman's Pool, return to the path and continue walking upstream until you eventually reach a stile at King's Corner. There is an option here to cross the stile and continue up to see the church at Harford, adding 2.2 miles to the walk. Otherwise do not cross the stile, but instead turn left up the steep steps.

0.5 miles

4 Go up the steps and follow the path to the left through the

trees. At the next signpost it is possible to take a left back down towards the river (a good idea if there has been lots of rain and the path ahead is likely to be muddy). Otherwise walk straight on along the old low-walled path past the old quarry on your right and eventually out onto the lane.

0.7 miles

5 You then have the highly recommended option of extending the walk with a stroll around Henlake Down. To do this, turn right through the unmarked metal gate with the granite post. Bear right and follow the footpath that circumnavigates the down in an anti-clockwise direction, eventually exiting back out onto the same lane.

1 mile

6 Continue down the lane



towards the viaduct. At the bottom of the hill, turn left over the old bridge and then right back to the car park.

0.4 miles

