

**Route E - Erme Valley, South West Quarter, 4 + hours,
() miles, experienced riders only, all moorland.**

Ivybridge –Three Barrows - River Erme – Plym Ford - Nuns Cross – Nr. Whiteworks – Princetown.

This is an exciting route going through the some of the best of the south east quarter of the moor. It is mostly easy to follow.

Awkward bits – North of, and around Erme pits at the head of the Erme river

The majority are easy to follow tracks with a lot of easy, grass, detours along side.

The upper end of the Erme valley is rightly described by Hemery in his book High Dartmoor as the best part of this quarter of the moor. Boxing to Princetown and back riding down is an easy & pleasant day's ride. Both ways in a day need fit horses and an early start.

Description Route E Erme Valley going NORTH

(You would probably join this a little further up but for simplicity we'll start here)

Map A 4-5

Start: SX 658 571 at the beginning of the Redlake Tramway, known locally as the puffing Billy Track. At the top of the very steep lane from the busy B3131& up past Cantrell works (Westmac Machinery).



Moorhaven Village – Plymouth old asylum is seen down to the east

Coming out of the moor gate turn left, east and follow the track for a long while.



E – Puffing Billy track – up from Cantrell

In total for about an hour and a half some 6 miles, There are obvious detours along green paths to the side nearly all the way on the good ground up as far as Three Barrows, after that, stay on track as ground is poor on both sides.

Ride along past and under Western Beacon, there are fine views west to the sea and Plymouth sound to the west for a long while, gaining height you bend toward and then pass Butterdon Hill up on your right, east and the track gently now going north bends around the smaller Weatherdon Hill with some large cairns on



E – Hangershell Rock –looks a bit like a tank

It then swings NE for a while passing the large isolated Hangershell rock up on the right, east.

(Looking a little left, north, you will see in the distance two recumbent stones which look like two people leaning into each other, on Piles Hill a mile away and a good green path marked mostly with stones. This is a good place for a canter in good weather and you can join the track again just beyond).

Soon the track levels out and crosses a bridle path shown on the map and on the right is usually a small shallow pool. 200m further right, east you can just see Spurrells cross, and some-what of a surprise just as you thought were well into the moor is South Brent and in-country further east. The track then bends left to go north for a long time.



E - Puffing Billy track towards three barrows

Gently climbing, you can ride now on either side of the track, keeping Three Barrows the biggest hill in the area now ahead of you. You pass or make a little detour left, west to Sharp Tor which is from this side a small flat grassy topped hill with flat topped rock which has great views up the Erme. Continuing up the track north to:

Map B4

Past or a detour up right, east to top of Three Barrows Hill which has the best views in the area. It is a great picnic spot and has a trig point to tie up to. North Hessary Tor TV mast at Princetown now becomes visible and this is a landmark that you will be roughly heading towards for the rest of the route.

(A dry weather only, route, but can be tiring & soft & wet goes nearly due north and we have marked " follow stones(boundary) in dry" goes about 2 miles , 3/4 hour and joins route [Z Zeal Tor Tramway route](#). But it feels very, almost distressingly, bleak in the middle part)

And then back down again to join track as it winds its way with now big views of the River Erme valley way down left, west below. at 650 626 there is a large lump of concrete on the right hand side with a large iron bar sticking out of it, a very useful and sheltered place to tie up. Now the ground gets worse beyond so stay on now you leave the track. It bends along here and there still with the Erme to the left, west below and then curves around NE and comes to a Lagoon on the right, east and a conical spoil china clay heap on the left.

These are just after the track crosses a rather splendid bridge, which offers some rare shelter in bad weather. This is a nice place for a picnic, and then on north up the track on a rather duller stretch for some 2 miles, says half an hour.

You now feel you are really well into the moor and this stretch can feel well bleak on a bad day. There is little shelter except after a mile and a half large on the right up hill a hundred metres is a sunken China clay Bed at SX 649 655. This is well hidden but drops down about 6 feet and will keep the worst off a hailstorm. Here there is a row of strong iron fence posts with holes in which make the best multiple tie up places for miles, most useful. Further up this series of beds is a small stone roofless hut that you can tie up to. You can join [Route Z](#) just east of the hut or you can also make an earlier short cut, where it says tin workings SX 652 652

Continue along where the track now bends round to the east and do not be tempted to take a short cut left, west to join the Erme, It is long brown grass, poor and tiring ground. Continue along to where it shows Abbots way/ Two Moors way Bridle path on the map at 64 5659. Here you join the Abbots way by turning turn sharp left down a green track, North West on [Route E](#) or right to briefly join the two moors way to start [Route Z](#).

Leaving, finally, the security of the Puffing Billy Track, there are actually two green paths, either will do, going down hill NW to cross the fast flowing [Redlake stream](#), the first crossing on the route.

sometimes one of these crossings may be washed away so try the next one further downstream if necessary, once on the far bank continue east down the other side until you swing around a little to the right and head NW along the bank of the River Erme.

Now what great country you are in. It is reasonable grass to ride on for a while, a lovely big quiet valley and just some roaming animals for company. This is what Hemery said was the best bit of the South west quarter and many agree. A great place for an overnight camp for backpackers or a picnic stop.

Continuing up the valley you will cross two brooks, [Dry Lake](#) at 637 662 and [Wellake](#) 633 664 both of the crossings are close down by where they join the main river. This is often the case with Dartmoor streams and can come as a surprise but is useful to remember elsewhere in similar ground. Past [Wellake](#) and you come towards the head of the [Erme](#).

In front of you on the left is the Erme Pits which are only really visible close up. They are huge deep and very steep, most attractive conical type mine workings with mountain goat type narrow paths through and around, well worth a look and a sheltered place for lunch

Getting around and beyond is the awkward part of this route and there are 3 choices.

Firstly, easiest to see, Fine in Really dry weather, you can go round them for about 600m well to the right, north. You make a large detour trying to follow one of several small green bits of paths which are not at all clear and cross through soft ground and eventually swing around west and join the distinct Abbots way green path. Don't stay too close in or you will hit the bog, we certainly have. This is only a short awkward bit but it can be tiring and you can lose shoes.... In dry weather it is usually OK.

Second choice is go left SW, just before the pits and [cross the Erme](#) by the [Erme pits ford](#) shown on the map approx SX 626 667 then turn right NW and follow the mountain goat type narrow track along the southern edge of the pits until where on the map it shows the track at the end of the pits SX622 668 crossing the last part of the Erme at SX 622 668, a very small stream now. Here it is very important to head NW and not head more west into very soft and boggy ground. Follow a possibly almost invisible green path NW until SX618 672 it joins the bigger path at a topped OS marked small Broad rock (just a metre high 2m long but important boundary stone) where you go left approx west.

Third Choice, keep close to what was the north side of river bank and along some awkward stony ground, NW up the north side of the first big spoil heap & weave and find your way up narrow mountain goat style tracks until you come out the other side of the pits at 622 668
And carry on as 2nd choice above

Well I hope you can follow that. It is really the only difficult part of the route.

Heading now on the abbots way NW to:

Map C4 for a short while in the bottom left corner and then joining:

Map C3 Here you start to see different views, lots of Tors to the North West and the Plym Valley, the Abbots way gradually turns more to the right and due north. The North Hessary Tor TV mast at Princetown now becomes a prominent landmark that you are roughly heading towards. This part is a wide green path that can be soft and has a few streamlets to cross. These are in deep peat and can be difficult and some horses don't like them. There are no real alternatives. Sometimes you might want to dismount and lead your horse over them.

In poor visibility you could lose the path so concentrate well here. After about a mile, say ¼ hour you will bend NW and come down and cross [Plym Ford](#) 610 684. What a simple quiet spot but somehow

a very special ford perhaps it is because here you cross into different country, the centre of the moor perhaps starts here.

Once the other side of the Plym you turn left on a green path along the side of the stream, west and soon join a good miners track and from now on it is easy all the way to Princetown.

(If you had turned right, east and tried to follow the bridle path shown on map to nuns cross farm you would find it really rather difficult to follow. It soon becomes a green path only used by a farmer's quad bike that doesn't follow the bridle path shown on the map. It goes back to the track south of nuns cross and very indistinct, it is better than nothing but in poor visibility you could soon get lost.)

After a couple of hundred yards west the track turns a bend into an interesting old mine workings area 608 682 with a bit of shelter and a pretty spot to stop a while next to a brook. There are lots of workings to the north and you can slowly wind your way up through them but it is not easy. Perhaps its is best to continue west along the track for about half a mile until you get either to a "short cut" green track right, north or continue to Eyebarrow Tin Mine workings and join, right, east, [Route P to Princetown](#).

This track is the leisure "motorway" bridlepath and the most popular in the area for walkers, mountain bikers and the army. It has a good surface and is easy to follow approx north all the way to Princetown. Sometimes you ride to the side; in other parts it is very poor so stick to the track. After about a mile you come to Nuns Cross 604 699 on the left of the track and Nuns Cross Farm which is used as an adventure centre on the right.

(Here you could turn right, east on [Route CT via Childes Tomb to Hexworthy](#) in good weather only. In any doubt wait and turn right east in about 400m the easier to follow [Route W Whiteworks to Hexworthy](#)).

Otherwise continue now NNW along the good track or to the side for about ½ hour, 2 miles approx. The TV mast is always a landmark ahead. Princetown village comes into view and then the moor wall and gate and onto:

Map D3 for a short way NNW along the bridle path into the village with the Excellent Plume of Feathers Inn on the left perhaps being your next stop. This has a paddock, some way from the pub& a good car park but do ask permission and pay them well if you are going to leave your transport here. They are very welcoming to riders. But remember it can be very busy in summer and a sudden change from the quietness of the moor. Also remember Princetown is the highest village on the moor and very bleak in bad weather

There is another good car park in the centre of the village (busy in season) and numerous tea shops etc.

End of Route E – Erme Valley Route

