

River and Railway

The River Teign rises on central Dartmoor at a height of 1,706 feet above sea level. Within a mile and a quarter of Teign Head are the sources of four other well known rivers: the Taw, Okement, Dart and Tavy.

The juvenile Teign cascades off the moor and appears to have reached its valley stage at Chagford, but, instead, watched over by Castle Drogo, it enters a gorge and is hidden by dense oak woods on each side for six miles.

At Steps Bridge, Dunsford, the Teign emerges into its valley proper and assumes the character seen here at Christow, where the river forms the boundary of the Dartmoor National Park.

When the river reaches Chudleigh Knighton, around seven miles downstream, the valley widens and the landscape is much more affected by man.

Where the River Bovey joins the Teign is found a relatively flat area, ringed with hills. This is the Bovey Basin, renowned for its valuable deposits of ball clay. The open cast workings, the most dominant feature of the area, extend into Newton Abbot, where the Teign becomes tidal and soon after has its estuary, actually a drowned valley. At Teignmouth, 34 miles from its source, the river flows into Lyme Bay.

For most of the way between Christow and Teignmouth, the river shared its course with a railway. From Teignmouth to Newton Abbot there is the Great Western, Paddington to Penzance main line, while from Newton the former Moretonhampstead Branch, still open in part for freight traffic, is never far from the Teign until the line strikes off to follow the River Bovey. The former Teign Valley Railway left the Moreton Branch at Heathfield and quickly met with the Teign at Chudleigh Knighton, where there was the first of five river bridges.

The Teign Valley Railway opened as an isolated standard gauge line in 1882. Its terminus was Teign House Siding, just south of the overline bridge here, but this was for goods and minerals only; the passenger terminus was Ashton, 1½ miles away. In 1903, the Exeter Railway made the line into Exeter and Christow Station opened.

These two railways, later generally known as the Teign Valley Branch, were the rumps of much grander schemes, one of which might have seen an electrified line following the Teign between here and Chagford, using power generated from the river.