



History

The route between Plymouth and Gunnislake comprises two railway lines, the first between Plymouth and Bere Alston, which was opened on 2 June 1890, and the second between Bere Alston and Gunnislake, which opened on 2 March 1908. Both were parts of longer routes until the mid-1960s.

This Tamar Valley Line passes through an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Mining is a huge part of the area's history and over the years silver, tin, copper, and arsenic were mined. There were over 100 mines close to the river in the 19th century and the area forms part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

1. As you leave **Plymouth Station** look to the left-hand side for this sculpture on the top of an old railway viaduct. The sculpture was created by Richard Deacon and is intended to represent the Moorland around Plymouth.



2. After leaving **Devonport Station** and passing through Dockyard Station again on the left-hand side you can see parts of Devonport Dockyard which dates back to 1691 and is the largest Naval Base in Western Europe.



3. At **St Budeaux Station** you may notice the driver leaving the train to collect a token from a steel box. The token system originated in the 19 Century to ensure that on single line tracks only one train at a time could use the line, and this system is still in use today.



4. You will soon be travelling beside the **River Tamar** and if you look back you will see two bridges spanning the river. The nearest is the suspension road bridge completed in 1961, and behind that is the Royal Albert Railway Bridge designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel and opened in 1859. In this area you will also see a jetty in the river and on the right-hand side of the train some buildings. These are part of the Defence Munition Centre which has been providing ammunition for Royal Naval Ships since the 1920's.

5. Shortly on the left-hand side you will see a promontory which is called **Warleigh Point**. This is a nature reserve on the outskirts of Plymouth. Passing through the heavily wooded nature reserve you may catch a glimpse of the old Tamerton Foliot railway station which is now a private house. This station was opened in 1897 but is more than 2 km from the village and so was little used. This station was closed in 1936 due to its underuse.

6. Leaving the Warleigh Point Nature Reserve the train crosses a bridge over the **River Tavy**. The river starts up on Dartmoor and flows through villages and a town which take their name from the river Tavy; the villages are Mary Tavy and Peter Tavy, and the town is Tavistock. Immediately after the bridge the River Tavy flows into the River Tamar. As you cross the bridge if you look back you can see the other side of the Warleigh Point Reserve and the two Tamar bridges in the distance. On the opposite bank of the River Tamar the village of Cargreen can be seen.



7. The next station is **Bere Ferrers**; this village is located on the Bere Peninsula. There is a Heritage Centre based here and some of the rail carriages have been converted to holiday accommodation.

The plaque and the mosaic are in remembrance of ten New Zealand soldiers who were on a troop train to a camp on Salisbury Plain from troop ships in Plymouth Sound on 24th September 1917. These men had been designated to collect refreshments at their first scheduled stop, which was



due to be Exeter. However, the train made an unexpected stop here and the troops, not knowing the country, climbed down onto the track and were hit by an express train travelling from Waterloo to Plymouth.



8. You then quickly arrive at **Bere Alston** station which owes its development not only to the local mines but also to the local farming community with produce being loaded onto trains for distribution. It is at this station that the train reverses its direction of travel and there once was a train line from here going to the town of Tavistock.



9. The train moves on towards **Calstock** and slows down to cross the viaduct over the River Tamar taking you from Devon into Cornwall. The viaduct was completed in 1908 and is 35 metres above the river.



Calstock was mentioned in the Domesday Book and became an important river port for the movement of fruit, flowers, copper and tin.



Looking on the left-hand side above the river you may see the National Trust property of Cotehele House which was built by the Edgcumbe family and dates from 1485. To the right of the house on the hilltop can be seen the 18 metres high Prospect Tower, a three-sided folly on the Cotehele estate. Calstock Station is a short walk to the village and the river. Cotehele House is a 2 Km walk from the village.



10. Leaving Calstock the train proceeds very slowly due to the gradient of the track and whistles and stops twice to warn road users as it crosses two narrow lanes, one of which has a blind bend just before the crossing.

11. Between the second stop and Gunnislake, on the left-hand side you can see a **stone chimney**. These can be seen all over Cornwall and are the remains of steam driven pumping stations for clearing water from mine workings.



12. Finally you arrive at **Gunnislake**, the village owes its development to the local mining industry which at its peak in the 1860's provided work for about 7,000 people. Mining activity finally ceased about 1930. Nearby is the Tamar Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Centre.

Gunnislake is at the centre of the Tamar Valley Area of the UNESCO Cornish Mining World Heritage Site. Although Gunnislake is now at the end of the Tamar Valley Line but before the line carried passengers there was a mineral railway connecting Gunnislake with the Kit Hill mines and quarries and the port of Calstock on the River Tamar. This line was opened in 1872 and was extended in 1908 to the village of Bere Alston via the new Calstock Viaduct.



13. On the return journey just before Calstock on a left-hand bend in the track you will catch a glimpse of some of the arches of the Calstock Viaduct.

14. While crossing back over the River Tavy you will see Warleigh Point again with the two bridges spanning the River Tamar in the background.



Look out for the train driver returning the token at St Budeaux Station.

The last thing to look at is the art on platform 3, where you get off the train, which has been created by local school children and artists. The names of the schools and artists are shown with the pictures.



Here is a link to an active art group in the Tamar Valley that holds regular Open Studios events. <https://drawntothevalley.com/>
Two other links that may interest you: <https://tamarvalley.org.uk> and <https://cornishmining.org.uk>

For more information about Trails of Discovery, go to our website: <https://trails.theartssociety.org>