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OTTER VALLEY ASSOCIATION

Volume 36/4
October
2015

Autumn Newsletter

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Registered Charity no:
278266

Summer Picture Gallery



**The Holy Grail – the source of the Exe (left) and subsequent celebrations!
22nd August**



**Stunning Purple Hairstreak
– 15th July near Otterton**



**Peaking on High Willhayes
– 26th July**



Local schoolchildren dipping in the brook – see page 7

**A magnificent turnout for the ‘Magnificent Seven’ (or eight!) –
29th July**



Cover photo courtesy of Mo Sandford

From the Editor

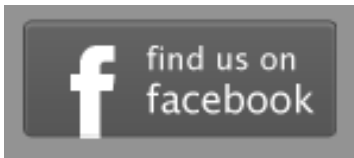
Phew! I made it to issue No 2 despite the errors in my first attempt. You will be delighted to hear that days/dates have been triple checked and, hopefully, no-one should turn up for a walk on the wrong day!

The annual summary of OVA walks, published in full on the website, highlights that members are walking more regularly and further. The total number of walks which took place from 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015 rose to 63 (from 56 in 2013/14) with 412 miles covered. The number of walkers increased from 498 to 643 in the same period.

According to the statistics OVA members walked a staggering total of 4,154 miles during the year! So put your feet up and have a cup of tea while you enjoy the latest issue of the newsletter and contemplate the programme of Walks and Talks for the next few months.

Jacqui Baldwin

Facebook



Yes, we have joined the modern(ish) world and set up a Facebook page. The page can be found at www.facebook.com/OtterValleyAssoc (or click on the Facebook logo at the bottom of the homepage on our website).

The page lists upcoming walks and talks. We also plan to put up photos of our events, and comments about our activities – including updates on the Neighbourhood Plan process. It is easy for visitors to the page to post comments or ask questions. We hope that this will help us communicate better with our membership – so please visit our page and click the “Like” button.



Chairman's Report

Crisis at the OVA?

A common theme from my previous Chairman's Reports has been the need for new volunteers. Unfortunately, so far, we have not filled our vacant positions. We still need help on the Natural Environment Committee, an Events person, an Hon. Secretary and Village Representatives for Otterton and Colaton Raleigh. At the end of our year, next May, I expect that there will be more vacancies on the Executive Committee after people step down having served their term. **If we can't fill the spaces it is possible that the OVA will have to disband. If you value the OVA and what we do in the Otter Valley please consider volunteering before it is too late.**

Neighbourhood Planning

East Devon District Council is finally moving closer to completing the Local Plan for East Devon. This will, amongst other things, determine the level of development that our area can expect to see over the next 15 years. It is partly due to the lack of an approved plan that we have seen so many developments proposed and built over the last few years.

The next level down from the Local Plan is a Neighbourhood Plan (NP). These plans allow local areas to take control of how their towns and villages grow. While NPs must support the Local Plan targets, they do allow communities to decide where and how to meet the targets. There are currently 34 villages in East Devon who either have a Neighbourhood Plan or who are working on one.

In our area Newton Poppleford and East Budleigh have started the NP process, and in July Budleigh Salterton also started work on a plan. The Budleigh Salterton plan will cover the whole parish, from Granary Lane and the mouth of the Otter Estuary on the eastern edge to East Devon Golf Course and West Down on the western side. A steering committee has been set up with members from the town council and representatives from the local community. Members of the OVA Executive are on the committee, and we will report back to our membership as the planning process moves forward. The first step is likely to be a questionnaire to all Budleigh residents asking for their opinions about the town and how they would like to see it develop. If you live in Budleigh expect to see the questionnaire come through your mailbox later this year.

Banks and Membership

Last year the OVA changed banks, from NatWest to Lloyds. Despite our best efforts, we still have some members whose subscriptions are paid into NatWest. We will be closing that bank account later this year, and so urge anyone who is still paying into NatWest to please switch to Lloyds (the form is on our website www.ova.org.uk under the Join Us/Find out more/How to join tabs). Anyone who has not transferred will drop off the membership list next April, and we don't want to lose you!

Talks

I would like to thank our Talks organiser, Graham Knapton, for an interesting and varied programme of talks over the last two years – and a good programme coming up this Autumn and Winter. This includes a talk on the River Otter beavers on November 24th given by Devon Wildlife Trust. Unfortunately for the OVA, Graham is retiring from this role after the winter season finishes. If you would like to see the OVA talks programme continue next Autumn/Winter (2016/7) please consider volunteering for the Talks Secretary position, we will be able to give you lots of support.

Roger Saunders

Re-Routing of the East Devon Way in Harpford



Devon County Council and AONB have jointly suggested that the best way to maintain the East Devon Way is to move the red bridge which crosses the river Otter in Harpford to Webbers Meadow. This is despite the offer of the loan of heavy plant machinery, free local labour and a will to keep the bridge in situ.

District Councillor, Val Ranger, believes that use of the bridge is under-estimated and that the current location provides a vital link between Newton Poppleford and Harpford.

Regular bridge users are invited to complete a bridge user survey, please email vranger@btinternet.com.

Countryside Learning

Over the summer 200 pupils from local schools swapped their classrooms for the countryside. Clinton Devon Estates hosted some of the youngest pupils from St Peter's Primary School at Stowford woods, a particularly special location offering a forded stream plus heath, woodland and farmland habitats to explore. Pupils from Newton Poppleford followed a route down the River Otter stopping to learn about historic hedgerows, beavers and finished with a quick farm visit. The pupils pulled up stalks of Himalayan balsam and dipped nets into the river identifying May fly larvae, Caddis fly and leeches. Otterton, Drakes and St Peter's primary schools took classes to Dalditch Farm where the children learned about organic dairy farming and all were captivated when herdsman Tim Curtis let them enter the parlour to see the cows being milked. The OVA helped make these visits possible by providing funding towards the cost of transporting the pupils by coach.



The Pebblebed Heath Conservation Trust

Management

On the Pebblebed Heaths wardens have been kept busy looking after the livestock employed to manage the scrub. There are 25 cattle and 25 Dartmoor ponies currently grazing on Bicton Common. Another 15 cattle have just left Colaton Raleigh Common and returned to their winter home. The grazing is focussed in a loop of temporary fencing to improve the habitats for the Southern Damselfly, a European Protected Species. The Southern Damselfly requires small channels of running water and it is the foot action of the cattle on the wet ground that helps this happen.

The fortnightly volunteers group starts again on Wednesday 30 September. The Trust would be happy to welcome you to this enthusiastic work party. Conservation tasks include scrub clearance, path maintenance and habitat creation. Contact kate.ponting@clintondevon.com for more information.

Himalayan Balsam

Himalayan balsam is still a great problem in the main river valley. However, due to the efforts of local volunteers, especially a dedicated contingent from the OVA, encouraging gains have been made to clear this unwanted species from a number of tributaries. It is hoped that further work will continue to drive back the balsam to the main valley and then work can start there. Uprooting Himalayan balsam is relatively easy but it does take manpower to be effective. The Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust employ a part-time balsam warden to help support community volunteer groups.

Visitor Plan

Footprint Ecology were contracted by EDDC in the spring 2015 to work with the Conservation Trust to develop a Visitor Management Plan for the Pebblebed Heaths. This will help fulfil the Council's obligations to mitigate against adverse impacts of new developments on sites of European importance.

A key part of this work has been to understand why and where people go and to collect patterns of visitor use. Throughout the summer, surveys have been conducted with visitors at key access points and some of you might even have been interviewed as part of this process.

Clinton Devon Farming

Clinton Farms have been busy with more Dutch heifers arriving in August to increase the herd at the Otter Dairy. As soon as they arrive these 'conventional' animals begin to eat organic grass and after six months their milk can be called organic.

If you walk past the farmland near the coast path above Otterton, you may have noticed some unusual plants growing amongst the spring barley. They include a purple flowered plant called *Phacelia* and dwarf sunflowers. *Phacelia* is loved by beneficial insects and has been planted under guidance from the RSPB to provide a source of seed for birds through the winter to help support a population of Cirl buntings.

Further information is on the Pebblebed Heaths website www.pebblebedheaths.org.uk and for local events posters in villages and in the Commons car parks or contact **Kate Ponting, Countryside Learning Officer**, kate.ponting@clintondevon.com 01395 466918

Planning Matters

One might think that planning applications and consultations became dormant and nothing happens during the summer months but that is definitely not the case.

Perhaps the most important planning application affecting our area is that of the continuation of Blackhill Quarry as a storage facility for aggregate. It is located on the Pebblebed Heaths. This is one of the most highly regarded conservation sites in Europe and, indeed, house building within 10km. of the site legally has to include mitigation strategies. Blackhill is home to rare and threatened species such as the Dartford Warbler, Southern Damselfly and the silver-studded Blue Butterfly. It is therefore perverse that a large area of the heath is devoted to storage of aggregate with the dust, noise and the visual intrusion. There are also the 200 daily movements of large lorries bringing the aggregate from the quarry site (it is proposed to use Straitgate Quarry, West Hill) and of course taking the aggregate to where it is needed. All these movements on our narrow Devon roads. If you wish to comment on the Allied Industries applications for an extension of their licence at Blackhill (DCC/3775/2015) or for quarrying at Straitgate Farm (DCC/3774/2015) contact planning@devon.gov.uk

The OVA has responded to EDDC's consultation on the built-up area boundaries (BUAB) of the local villages in our patch. The OVA pointed out that the two villages involved in the consultation, East Budleigh and Newton Poppleford, are both sited in the East Devon AONB. This criteria had not been included in the consultation and, of course, conservation of landscape and scenic beauty in designated landscapes is given great weight and planning permission should be refused in these areas except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated that it is in the public interest. Also, again missing in the consultation, both East Budleigh and Newton Poppleford lie within the 10km sensitivity of the Pebblebed Heaths and Exe Estuary overlap SAC/SPA zone. Any development taking place within 10 km of this zone must demonstrate that the development cannot be provided outside the sensitive zone and to provide Habitat Mitigation.

Some of the most difficult planning applications that we review are those concerning garden infill. What to one person is overdevelopment is to another perfectly acceptable. However, the OVA does generally respond to infill or demolition in conservation areas. The conservation areas have been chosen for

many reasons and the National Planning Framework Policies (NPPF) give the same protection to these areas as a National Park and AONB. We ask “how will proposed alterations affect the historic character of the building and its setting?” and also look at the relevant policies in the East Devon Local Plan and NPPF. Conservation Areas are particularly special to Budleigh Salterton because, unlike the villages, very few houses are nationally listed and the Edwardian, Arts and Crafts style houses which make up a large majority of the housing stock have only conservation area designation.

Local Heritage - Frewins, Budleigh Salterton

The research work needed for the local heritage project has uncovered some fascinating historical facts. For example, Frewins, a cul-de-sac of Arts and Crafts style houses in Bedlands Lane, Budleigh Salterton has connections with the suffragette movement.

In 1913 the Budleigh Salterton National Union of Women’s Suffrage Society was affiliated to the South-Western Federation of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies and its Secretary was Miss Ethel Frewin Mathieson of Otterbourne, Coastguard Road, Budleigh Salterton. This was a non-militant society, founded by Millicent Gareth Fawcett. Miss Mathieson resigned her post in the Budleigh Salterton branch to become secretary of the South-Western Federation and she also sat on the main National Executive in London.

At that time, before the First World War, a woman’s place was strictly in the home so she must have been a very forceful and remarkable character to accomplish all she did. She lived in Otterbourne until her mother died in 1921, moved away but came back in 1947 to Hale Lodge, Westfield Close. She died in 1954 at the Cottage Hospital.

Miss Mathieson and her sister, Mrs. Wales, were interested in the Arts and Crafts Movement. At this time the new Letchworth Garden City was being built and this had much influence on the movement. On 11th December 1911 Miss Mathieson bought a field at the top of Bedlands Lane, Budleigh Salterton. The land, known as Bedlands, was owned by Jane Connett of Chard, Somerset. Miss Mathieson hired Cecil Hignett, who had been an assistant architect to the architects who designed Letchworth. His brief was to build a group of terraced cottages with allotments, incorporating garden city principles. The houses were

for local people with a rent of no more than two and sixpence. Are these the first affordable houses built in Budleigh Salterton for the open market in contrast to the Mark Rolle buildings built for estate employees?

The houses were built by a firm of Exmouth builders from red brick with red tiled roofs in the Arts and Crafts style. The ground floor ceilings were unusual in design as the beams were positioned to act as ceilings and also as the floor to the next storey. The stairway was designed to fit into a small cupboard space. The doors and cupboards were made of pine. Unfortunately Miss Mathieson's money ran out and the houses were left with no plaster!

Nicola Daniel

Bathing Prohibited?



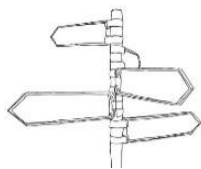
Might this be the sign that greets visitors to Budleigh Salterton next summer? According to a recent report in *The Sunday Telegraph* (23 August 2015) it is a distinct possibility.

New EU regulations that raise the 'pass mark' for beaches around Europe are expected to deem many picturesque spots unfit for swimming. 24 beaches, including Budleigh Salterton, Lyme Regis and Teignmouth, were named as 'at risk' of being blacklisted due to poor results over the past 4 years. Coastal towns are now making last ditch efforts to improve water quality and results are due to be published shortly. The Environment Agency cites agriculture as a main pollutant – often due to effluent from livestock grazing near streams that feed into the sea. Other beaches have problems from sewage treatment works or outflows. In Teignmouth guano from pigeons roosting beneath the pier is a major source of pollution. The council has stuck up thousands of petronella and garlic scented stickers to deter them!

Those that fail the tests have been told that they will have to put up signs issuing advice against bathing before May 2016. Critics insist that the waters are safe and fear the new signs could harm the tourism industry.

If you see significant pollution in the Otter river please contact the EA. (tel. 0800 80 70 60) so they can investigate.

A Walk for Everyone - Autumn Programme 2015



Colaton Raleigh gets top billing, with three walks starting from the village pub car park, but fortunately all going in different directions, on different days (2 & 18 Nov & 5 Dec), and all offering lunch in the Otter Inn afterwards. Not to be outdone, East Budleigh has two walks starting from its village car park but of a very different nature. On 19 October this location is just the start of the foothills that lead to the conquest of High Peak. It's also the rendezvous for a celebratory Boxing Day walk; ***please let David Daniels know in good time if you would like to stay for lunch at the Sir Walter Raleigh.***

If it's views you crave then join us for a walk along the Wessex Ridgeway on 16 October, or 13 November when we again venture towards Dorset. Of course, we have our own coastal views that we will be revisiting on 10 October, 31 October (Jon gets the prize for the most creative walk title!), 24 November and 16 December. So we will be doing our bit to celebrate the Coast Path when the SWCP Association promote this iconic long distance trail during October.

The Blackdown Hills is the location for two very different walks on 29 October and 6 November. First to Luppitt, and a tour of our local Otter brewery, but not before we earn the right with a short walk. ***Please let Andrew know in good time if you would like a place on the coach.*** Ten days later (6 Nov) we shall be starting high up at Castle Neroche.

A few years ago we walked all of the East Devon Way, but this time we are just sampling a section nearby at Fire Beacon Hill (9 Dec), before returning further east to Musbury in the new year (13 January). Good views from both points.

Do you know where to find the Devonshire Heartland Way? Join us on 30 January to find out!

We are doing our best to keep your stress levels under control in the run up to Christmas with a gentle walk on the Commons (28 Nov). And there is only one way to kick start the New Year, and that's with our local walk over the Commons on 9 January. Closer to home is our exploration of some of Saltertons byways and boundaries on 20 January, and even closer to home is a treat for bird watchers, when Doug leads his informative walk along the Otter on 14 November.

Now, some advance notice for all our trail baggers. Coming in February and March we will be repeating our walk along the Templer Way. 18 miles in two downhill stages from Haytor to Teignmouth. (Just need to ascertain the tide times!), and for the first time, commencing in the Spring, we will be tackling Devon's Coast to Coast from Wembury to Lynmouth. 117 miles in twelve stages, incorporating the Two Moors Way.

Please consult the OVA Website for the latest details about unavoidable changes to this Programme, after publication of the Autumn Newsletter.

Happy walking and we look forward to seeing you soon.

Chris and Mike



Walks Programme – October to January

Friday, 16th October, 10.45am WALK

Meet: Newton Poppleford Recreation Ground CP at 09.30, (OS Explorer 115, SY 088 999) to share cars.

Start: Charmouth Beach CP, (OS Explorer 116, SY 365 930), safe all day parking for £2.00, 10 miles, 5-6 hours.

“A very high view” - Following the Wessex Ridgeway with panoramic views over the Dorset countryside, taking in the Iron Age forts of Coney's Castle and Lambert Castle. Enjoy wall-to-wall autumn colours. Please bring a packed lunch.

Walk leader: Vivien Insull 01404 811267

Monday, 19th October, 10:00 am WALK

Start at East Budleigh Car Park (OS Explorer 115, SY 066 849) 8½ miles

“A showcase for the SW Coast Path, and our own Otter Valley”

A walk to the Coast Path and the top of High Peak, returning along green lanes round Anchoing Hill to afternoon tea at Otterton. Please bring a picnic.

Walk Leader: Chris Buckland, 01395 444 471

Thursday 29th October, 2.45pm WALK & OTTER BREWERY VISIT

Start near the Otter Brewery, Luppitt, (OS Explorer 115, ST 179 081), 5½ miles 3½ hours

“Work up a thirst”

An afternoon Walk in the Blackdown Hills around Luppitt followed by an Otter Brewery Tour starting at 6.00pm. The walk, which includes some sharp hills and superb views, will start near the Brewery and head south to a burial mound and then north through Luppitt village and back to the Brewery across Hense Moor. If the moor is very wet there is a handy diversion going north along a little used lane, for the last mile.

After the walk, there will be a tour of the Otter Brewery a starting at about 6.00pm which will include hot food, beer and soft drinks at a cost of £18:50 per head. Numbers will be limited to 25. Please let Andrew know **before 15th October** if you wish to attend and if you wish to take the coach option below.

Transport: Meet at 2.00pm Budleigh Salterton Public Hall to:

- i. Either share cars, or
- ii. A coach from the Public Hall to the Brewery and return will be arranged if there is sufficient demand. The return journey will depart from the Brewery at about 9.30pm. The coach will cost £10 per head.

There is also an option to only join the Brewery Tour starting around 6.00pm. Again please let Andrew know before 15th October if you wish to join the tour.
Walk Leader: Andrew Beresford 01395 446543 / andrew@beresfords.net

Saturday, 31st October, 11.00am WALK

Start: Branscombe Village Hall (OS Explorer 115, SY 1975 0872) 8 miles, 4½ hours.

“Bootiful Branscombe!”

Bus number 899 departs from Sidmouth Triangle at 10.30, via Sidford (10:38) arrives at Branscombe Village Hall at 10.50 for an 11.00 start. Car parking at the Village Hall (donation requested). Anyone who can offer others a lift or needs one should contact the walk leader. The walk circles the centre of Branscombe giving good views of this charming village. It then follows the SW coast path eastwards to Branscombe Mouth for lunch at the Sea Shanty Café and continues via the Under Hooken to Beer. Returning along the cliff top (with impressive views of Lyme Bay on a clear day) completes a figure-of-eight. Paths are generally well-made, but can be steep and/or rocky over short sections.

Walk Leader: Jon Roseway 01395 488739 / 07887936280

Monday, 2nd November, 10.00am WALK

Start at Colaton Raleigh Church (OS Explorer 115, SY 082 872) 7 miles.

“A wonderful walk, well worth the effort!”

Passaford Lane (steep uphill!), Mutters Moor, coastal path, green lanes, River Otter, Colaton Raleigh Church

Walk Leader: Brian Turnbull 01395 567339

Friday, 6th November, 10.00am WALK

Start: Castle Neroche car park (OS Explorer 128, ST 274 157), 8½ miles, 5 hours.

“Another Iron Age Hill Fort”

Castle Neroche is 3km north of the Eagle Tavern on the A303 just after the dual carriageway at Marsh. Alternatively, assemble at Newton Popleford Recreation Ground (OS Explorer 115, SY 088 899), to share cars for a 9.00am departure.

Easy walking, mostly good tracks, with a short length of country road. The walk is mainly in the forest, adjacent to farmland, in the Blackdown Hills AONB.

Walk Leader: Iain Ure 01395 568 158

Friday, 13th November, 10.00am WALK

Start: Trinity Nature Reserve car park (OS Explorer 116, SY 307 957), 5 miles.

“Flirting with Dorset”

A circular walk starting through the plantation and then dropping down Hayton Hill towards Yawl. Then to Yawl Cross Walk, Yawl Hill and then down Carswell Bottom, with good views towards Uplyme before heading back around Knoll Hill; ending with a steep walk up Cathole Lane back to the Trinity Plantation.

Walk Leader: Vivien Insull 01404 811267

Saturday, 14th November, 10.00 am Guided WALK

Start at White Bridge (OS Explorer 115, SY 076 830) 2½ miles, 2 hours

A leisurely walk along the River Otter watching and identifying the arriving winter birds with Doug Cullen, Voluntary Warden of the Pebblebed Heath Conservation Trust. Please bring binoculars if you have them.

Walk Leader: Doug Cullen, 01395 567 574

Wednesday, 18th November, 10.00am WALK

Start at the Otter Inn, Colaton Raleigh (OS Explorer 115, SY 0778 8734), 5 miles

“Hawkerland before lunch”

An ‘easy’ walk north, briefly by the River Otter turning west along green lanes, agricultural tracks and footpaths via Monkey Lane to cross the Hawkerland Valley, before returning to Colaton Raleigh and lunch at the Otter Inn.

Walk Leader: Mike Paddison 01395 446 550.

Tuesday, 24th November, 10.00am WALK

Start: CP opposite the Norman Lockyer Observatory (OS Explorer 115 SY 139 881), 6 miles, 3 hours.

“Beyond Sidmouth”

Some strenuous sections along the SW Coast path to Weston Mouth, Weston, the Donkey Sanctuary and Salcombe Regis. Please bring a picnic and/or enjoy refreshments at the Donkey Sanctuary.

Walk Leader: David Buss, 01395 442 621 / 07920 114 573

Saturday, 28th November, 10.00am WALK

Start: Wheathill Plantation CP (OS Explorer 115 SY 041 847) 3 miles.

“Improve your mood”

A short and sociable walk on the commons to relieve those growing pre-Christmas pressures.

Walk Leader: David Daniel 01395 445 960

Tuesday, 1st December, 10.30am WALK

Start: CP at the Blue Ball Inn, Sidford (OS Explorer 115 SY 138 898) 8 miles, 3-3½ hours.

“Beyond Sidmouth; the sequel”

Moderate with some steep ascents. Walk to Knowle House, Lower Sweetcombe, Mincombe Wood, Harcombe Hill, and Harcombe. Please bring a picnic and/or enjoy refreshments at the Blue Ball afterwards.

Walk Leader: David Buss 01395 442621

Saturday, 5th December, 10.00am WALK

Start: Colaton Raleigh Church (OS Explorer 115 SY 082 872) 5 miles

“An ideal walk for a short winter’s day”

Down green lanes and over the commons, visiting Dotton, Goosemoor and Naps Lane. Optional lunch at the Otter Inn.

Walk Leader: Brian Turnbull 01395 567339

Wednesday, 9th December, 10.30am WALK

Start: Newton Popleford Recreation Ground (OS Explorer 115, SY 088 899), 5-6 miles

“All the fun at the start”

A circular walk picking up the East Devon Way at Harpford going up to Fire Beacon Hill. We will then drop down to Coombe, through Hollowhead Cross and onto Tipton St John and follow the Otter back to Newton Popleford.

Walk Leader: Viv Insull 01404 811267

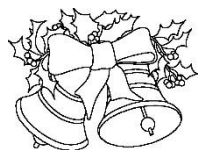
Wednesday, 16th December, 10.00am WALK

Start: Knowle Village Hall CP (OS Explorer 115 SY 052 827) 7½ miles

“Exploring the Western Front”

A largely level walk to Orcombe Point, the Gateway to the Jurassic Coast, using the disused railway track to Littleham Church and attractive rural paths. Distant views across the estuary to Berry Head while we eat our lunch, before climbing back along the coast path to West Down Beacon and views to Beer and Portland.

Walk Leader: Chris Buckland, 01395 444 471



Saturday, 26th December, 10.30am WALK

Start at East Budleigh CP (OS Explorer 115 SY 066 849) 4 miles

“A celebration”

Gentle Boxing Day walk across the commons at this time of good cheer. Optional lunch at the Sir Walter Raleigh.

(Please telephone walk leader by 6th December to book lunch)

Walk Leader: David Daniel 01395 445 969

Saturday 9th January, 10.00am. WALK

Start: Knowle Village Hall CP (OS Explorer 115, SY 052 827), 5 miles, 2.5 hours.

“Walk in the New Year”

A circular undulating walk over the commons to Bystock Fishponds with varied topography including woodland and heathland. May be muddy. Optional lunch at the Britannia Inn – if open!

Walk leader: Steve Hagger, 01395 442631

Wednesday 13th January, 10.00am WALK

Start at Trinity Hill CP (OS Explorer 116, SY 304 955), 7.5 miles.

“A castle view”

Route via Woodhouse Hill, East Devon Way, Musbury (panoramic views of the Axe Valley from the castle), and Great Trill. Please bring a picnic.

Walk leader: Ted Swan 01395 567450

Wednesday 20th January, 10.00am. WALK

Start: Kersbrook (under railway bridge), (OS Explorer SY 069 830), 7 miles, 3 hours.

“Byways and Boundaries”

A devious figure of eight route along the alleyways and byways of Budleigh and its boundaries, including part of the old railway track and some of the coast path between Budleigh and West Down Beacon.

Walk leader: Chris Buckland 01395 444471

Saturday 30th January, 10.15am. WALK

Start at Stoke Cannon (OS Explorer 114, SX 9384 9793), 6 miles, 3 hours.
Meet at Exeter Bus Station at 9.45am. Outward via bus 55, dep. Exeter Bus Station 10:00am, arr. Stoke Cannon 10.11am.

“Two Rivers Way”

Walk north from the village along the Exe Valley Way to Burrow Farm from where we head west along the banks of the River Exe to Bramford Speke where we will stop for coffee. We then head further west along the Devonshire Heartland Way, crossing several tributaries of the Rive Exe, to Upton Pyne. From this point we head downhill to the River Creedy whose banks we follow all the way to Newton St Cyres and lunch at the famous Engine. After lunch a short walk takes us to the A377 where buses run to Exeter every 15 minutes.

Walk Leader: Mike Paddison, 01395 446 550



Talks and other dates for your Diary:

17th October – Blackdown Mushroom Foray – Blagdon Hill



Hunt for wild fungi and learn how to identify a variety of toadstools from the weird to the wonderful.

Walk is free but booking essential. 11.00am to 2.00pm.

For full details visit www.blackdownhillsaonb.org.uk

17th/18th October and 31st October/1st November EVENT

What's on Your Doorstep?

A FREE two-weekend event aimed at showing you how you can find out which mammals are on your doorstep. Families are welcome, but booking is essential as places are limited. More details on the OVA web site.

Please book direct with Adrian Bayley (adrianbayley@btconnect.com).

Note: this is not an OVA organised event

25th October – Ancient Technology Experience: Textiles

Newhaven Copse, Whitestaunton, Nr Chard – 10.00am to 4.00pm

Visit traditionally managed woodland to learn about a number of different ancient rural skills including weaving, dying and tanning.

For full details visit www.blackdownhillsaonb.org.uk

**And just in time for Hallowe'en – Bats at the Mill
29th October – Otterton Mill - 10.00am to 4.00pm
FREE – no booking required**



Join licenced bat worker Sarah Butcher and Clinton Devon Estates in the Orchard to learn more about these amazing nocturnal mammals. There will be activities for children and a fact-finding trail along the river Otter.

**24th November - Joint OVA/Ottertton Garden Club Talk – 7.30pm
'Beavers on the Otter' - Otterton Village Hall**

Following the decision by Natural England earlier this year to licence a 5 year Beaver trial on the River Otter, Mark Elliott from Devon Wildlife Trust will update us on this exciting project.

Contact: Graham Knapton 445872

**Tuesday 19th January – Talk – 7.30pm
'Dartmoor Towns & Villages' - Knowle Village Hall**

Paul Rendell looks at the history and lifestyles within some of the villages and towns on the Moor. Places include Princetown and Sheepstor.

Contact: Trevor Waddington 443978

**15th February – Talk – 7.30pm
'The role of a Public Rights of Way Warden' - Peter Hall, Budleigh Salterton**

Day-to-day proactive management of the rights of way network is the responsibility of the local Public Rights of Way Warden. The Wardens work to ensure that the Highway Authority and landowners are maintaining access along public rights of way to the proper standards. Richard Spurway, the Warden for Devon County Council, will talk about his role.

Contact: Graham Knapton 445872

**16th March – Talk – 7.30pm
'RNLI' East Budleigh Village Hall.**

The Royal National Lifeboat Institution is the charity that saves lives at sea and provides on call, a 24-hour lifeboat search and rescue service and a seasonal lifeguard service. Brian Cole from Exmouth RNLI will talk about the charities work including details of incidents, both local and national.

Contact: Graham Knapton 445872

Walks Reports

Exe Valley Way Stage IV, Tiverton to Bampton – 1st July

Ten happy walkers travelled on the bus from Exeter on a warm dry day. Firstly we crossed to the West of the Exe and then headed North, briefly on the A3126 past a large textile factory before joining the more minor roads and lanes beyond. Initially we were kept from the river's edge by gardens and then we were a bit unnerved by building work near the river. Whilst our route for the most part generally followed the line of the Exe there were periods when we were nearer than others which made the terrain all the more interesting.

For quite some way we travelled along one side of a beautiful valley with unobstructed views. Although the route was mostly on paved roads and lanes they were quiet and we were not unduly troubled by traffic. We stopped for a well-earned lunch break on a bridge at a place I think called Cove. The route then wound North to Bampton after the Exe loops sharply West. We were then mostly on smaller tracks following the line of Exe tributary, the River Batherm.

Generally the route was quite undulating with only the occasional lengthy incline but none of it particularly challenging which appeared to suit everyone. There may, or may not, have been a small navigational error but we were all unperturbed and remained in very good humour.

To my delight we had time for further refreshments in Bampton before catching a local bus to back Tiverton for the return journey to Exeter. Guiltily encouraged by yours truly some also enjoyed their first small sampling of Pimms at the 250 year old Quarryman's Rest, although most enjoyed tea.

A good day out in fine weather leading to high hopes for the next stage on 1st August.

Andrew Beresford

'Dorset Delights' – 4th July 2015

As we approached Abbotsbury temptations for an alternative day out were everywhere– subtropical gardens, “baby swans” (aah, but cygnets to you and I) and a honey-coloured tea room on every corner. The latter was clearly only a

matter of delayed gratification. Nobly, we stuck to our plan to go for a 9½ mile walk, after all we were hardy OVA walkers in Hardy country.

So it was that we followed the signs to White Hill onto the South Dorset Ridgway, an ancient route from Neolithic times running between West Bexington and Osmington Mills, all the time hoping that the cloud rolling in off the sea would clear to bless us with commanding views. None-the-less we enjoyed a brisk and bracing walk along the ridge, stopping from time to time to examine ruins whose purpose has been lost along with the roofs.

The low cloud jinx (the superstitious amongst us could be forgiven for thinking this was connected to there being 13 walkers) was with us to the end of our high level walk, just occasionally teasing us with a glimpse of what we might see. As we approached West Bexington the cloud did indeed clear but we bravely ignored the injustice and strolled down the hill to the sea and a beach picnic. The sun shone gloriously as we returned along the coast path past East Bexington and towards Abbotsbury. Over the fields the map shows the intriguingly named Labour- in-Vain Farm perhaps signifying past trials and tribulations.

Above Abbotsbury we packed in one more hill so that we could visit the ancient Chapel of St Catherine, the patron saint, we were reliably informed, of maidens and spinsters who might be looking for a husband. Supplications from the single ladies present were not forthcoming. We did, however, soak up the peaceful atmosphere of a long standing sacred building where monthly services are still held.

Then we skipped down the hill and into the Old School House now a tearoom where we were not disappointed with the cream teas and cakes on offer, an excellent choice to end a varied and enjoyable day. Many thanks to Bettina for taking us to very enjoyable pastures new.

Viv Insull

Bystock Nature Reserve – 21st July

Brian was particularly well organised even supplying a copy of his route on a second map for the back marker – which made it easier for yours truly to accept my nomination for this role. More on that later.

As it was a warm, sometimes hot, dry day some chose purposeful but lighter footwear which worked well for most of the time. There was, however, a lengthy downhill stretch on what resembled a stony riverbed which caused discomfort for some. Remembering this helps explain the subsequent lengthy inclines which seemed inexplicable at the time.

The route turned out slightly longer than billed but this was not an issue although we all politely declined the offer of a short extension up and down a rather steep hill. In places Brian commented that the vegetation had grown rather a lot since his reconnoitring visit which, unhelpfully, partially obstructed some views for those of somewhat shorter stature.

The walk was like a clockwise lozenge to gain the benefit of magnificent full frontal views from the ridge overlooking East Budleigh. Brian had thought this through carefully to avoid cricked necks likely from the opposite direction.

The tail-enders had an interesting chat with the previous occupants of the house that collapsed whilst under renovation a year or so ago. We felt very sad about the difficulties the current owners now appear to be in. This caused the tail to get even longer which took a while for the Back Marker to fix as he was mostly responsible.

When we saw lots of pigs someone asked why roast pig was mostly billed as Hog Roast. A farming lady we saw seemed not to appreciate the need to ask such a question and maybe just assumed we were pig ignorant – whatever that really means.

A very enjoyable day out in good company with much debate about spelling and pronunciation – I might in future just say lovely. I was particularly delighted to learn that Jean had known Brian since she was 14!

Andrew Beresford

Familiarity breeds content(ment) – 15th July

We were alarmed at the start of our walk to see our Walk Leader leaning precariously over the side of White Bridge. Surely the prospect of leading yet another OVA walk cannot have got to him that badly? However, we were reassured to find that Chris was merely studying a deceased *Rhizostoma pulmo*, better known as the Barrel jellyfish which was nearly a metre in diameter! After an extended briefing, including a warm welcome to two new walkers, he reminded us that however familiar we might be with the planned walk, the

pleasure of companionship and stimulating conversation should be enough to ensure that our time would be well spent. We struck off for the SWCP heading east, passing a wild flower headland bordering a field with a mixed crop of oats and barley. I was to learn subsequently that CDE had sown this field specifically to attract the scarce Cirl Bunting, a cousin of the more familiar Yellowhammer. Butterflies were in abundance which pleased your correspondent, although the brown butterflies (Meadow and Hedge Browns and Ringlets) all looked alike to our intrepid leader. At the top of the hill we enjoyed a wonderful view of Budleigh beach and learnt that the JCB activities were keeping the field drains clear of shingle so that the hinterland did not flood. On our way to Brandy Head we were serenaded by skylarks but no one could locate them in the low cloud. Despite the overcast weather the view of the Jurassic Coast was impressive and the cloud formations where Portland Bill should have been looked like a curtain draped over the sea. I saw a lone Marbled White butterfly, which also belongs to the family of Browns (*Satyridae*), with a striking black and white pattern. We left the coast path and joined the lane at Monks Wall by the thatched cottage that, legend has it, was once associated with Otterton Priory. We headed towards Anchoring Hill which was used as a landmark in the distant past for incoming ships when Otterton was an important Devon port. Hidden away in a bend in the lane was Anchoring Cottage – a pretty “chocolate box” dwelling. We skirted Anchoring Hill with good views of Otterton village on our left and emerged by the Mill for refreshments. The return to White Bridge was via Park Lane. The highlight for me was spotting a Purple Hairstreak butterfly which fluttered forlornly to the ground. The textbooks suggest that this insect is quite tame and so to prove the point I placed my hand next to it and it crawled on to my finger. The slower half of the group who had not sprinted ahead were treated to the sight of this beautiful butterfly opening its wings to reveal an iridescent sheen (see photo inside front cover). This was only exceeded by the exotic colours of a kingfisher that flashed past us when we returned to the start at White Bridge. Chris was right in saying that it was well worth re-visiting familiar haunts as there is always something new to see. Our thanks to him for organising a most enjoyable outing!

David Hatch

Lessons Learned the Hard Way - 26th July

On a wet Sunday morning five stalwart members of the OVA Walk Section set out to climb the two highest peaks in Southern England. This was in spite of an appalling weather forecast and distinctly menacing weather on the horizon, but it was reasonably warm.

We all duly arrived at Okehampton station, two walkers by car and the others by the weekly Sunday train service from Exeter, to enjoy a brief spell of bright sunshine and blue skies. Our spirits rose as we discussed the merits of wet weather gear and held the weather forecasters up to ridicule. After a last minute “convenience stop” at the station we set off at a cracking pace with our spirits high. Up the hill and over a very noisy A30, some 40 to 50 feet below, and across a meadow losing out to brambles and bracken. Then onwards to the tarmac road that leads to the Okehampton Army camp and on to the track that leads to Rotor, the first of the four tors of the day.

By this time the weather was looking less promising with clouds boiling on the horizon, but we were maintaining a good pace. Our spirits were high as we reached the bridge by the road to the Army barracks when one of the walkers complained that they were overheating – layers were duly removed. About 4km further on the rain started, gently at first and then the wind came to whip up a nice squall and to lower the temperature. At this point she who had removed layers was deciding whether to reinstate them when the cry went up “I’ve left my camera at the Bridge”. Panic ensued briefly until the leader restored order by directing the party to continue onwards uphill under the leadership of yours truly whilst he (the leader) accompanied the hapless individual back down hill to retrieve the camera. The party continued uphill in shrieking wind and rain and finally took shelter in a “bomb crater” to wait out the arrival of the leader and photographer complete with camera. After what seemed to be an interminably long period (5 to 10 mins) we were all together again and we continued uphill at a gentler pace to Rowtor during which time the weather had abated considerably.

After a short period during which we congratulated ourselves on ‘one down and three to go’, the cloud cover broke and we could see West Mill Tor. At the top of West Mill Tor it was wet and cold because there was very little shelter from the wind. As we took shelter huddled behind rocks, there was a brief break in the rain and we could see Yes Tor our next goal. Our leader scanned the horizon, called on his ancestors’ spirits and declared there would be no rain for the next hour and was prepared to take wagers on the outcome. There were no takers, the rest of the party were concerned that the leader was having some kind of episode or had indeed taken leave of his senses. But the rain did stop!



We pressed on down the hill across boggy ground saturated by the rain and, needing nifty footwork, crossed a shallow ford fortunately not swollen by the rain and climbed slowly up the other side to the top of Yes Tor – one more to go. The climb was not strenuous, but the developing hunger pangs and cold made everyone focus on getting to the top as soon as possible. Our intrepid photographer snapped away at some horses sensibly standing in the lee of the tor.

We took the hint, headed in their direction and tucked down behind some rocks for lunch whilst our leader and photographer headed to the very top to engage in conversation with a solitary walker, probably to give the poor fellow the OVA membership sales pitch!

After lunch there was a relatively flat, easy and quick walk to High Willhayes. This tor is always a bit of a disappointment to the writer because there is nothing spectacular about the top. There are even doubts about which pile of rocks is the peak, so we visited them all.

After a brief motivating talk from the leader, and an acknowledgement that fine rain had indeed come within the hour and so he lost his bet, we set out for the Okemont River and the Tarka Trail. To save time, we eschewed the track and did some rough moor walking cutting off some of the larger corners.

The downhill walk was fast and we arrived at the river after only one minor navigational hiccup, and began our walk alongside the river. The Tarka Trail is very pretty and spectacular in parts and all the more exciting because the rocks upon which we were walking were slippery after the rain. We exited the trail and embarked on a new route to the station because the bridleway we normally used was closed for repairs and the posted alternative was much longer and time was very tight. We had twenty minutes to walk over a mile to get to the station on time.

Unfortunately the path was anything but flat. It was constant uphill with steep bits in places and soon we were spread out with the front pack now out of sight on the bends. The 'tortoises' at the back noticed a short cut across a meadow to the bridge over the A30 and presumed that the 'hares' had taken this route. In summary the 'tortoise' at the back got to the station in time for his ginger beer and to catch the last train of the week whilst the 'hares' had to walk about an

extra mile and so missed the train. Fortunately all was not lost since there were sufficient seats in the car for all and an embarrassment was avoided.

All felt a sense of accomplishment and a few lessons were learned about tight timescales and the impact of unexpected events.

Our thanks go to our 'hairy' leader for getting us up the hills and safely back down again.

Backmarker

A Walk on Woodbury Common – 29th July ***“The Magnificent Seven, or was it Eight?”***

It was with some trepidation that our walk leader arrived at the Woodbury Castle Car Park. The route had been reconnoitred the previous week and all was well; the weather promised ideal walking conditions; but the great unknown was the number of walkers. For an 8-9 mile OVA walk about a dozen walkers would be average, but this walk had been the subject of much wider publicity than normal! By ten o'clock 34 walkers and one dog had assembled in the car park! The vast majority of walkers were not the usual OVA suspects nor were they members of the OVA. It was obvious that the East Devon Heath Week organisers had done a very good job advertising the events.

The walk started with an introduction by Kate Ponting on the purpose and scope of Pebblebed Heath Week and the work of the Conservation Trust. This was followed by an opportunity that Chris could not miss – a captive audience for his OVA membership sales pitch. This was well received and Chris's entire stock of OVA membership forms was handed out to eager prospective members.

The walk objective was to visit eight (seven known and one iffy one) of the thirteen commons that are in the vicinity of Woodbury Castle. It started with a short amble to a point in the middle of nowhere where a yellow ribbon had been thoughtfully placed to identify the point where three Parish boundaries and their respective commons come together. An eagle-eyed walker spotted the yellow ribbon first and saved the walk leader the embarrassment of wandering around trying to find where he had placed it during the preceding week. Walkers walked around the bush and thus visited Woodbury Common, Colaton Raleigh Common and Bicton Common all in one fell swoop.

The next common was reached after walking alongside Uphams plantation and crossing the Four Firs/Yettington Road we entered an area containing a disused rifle range where we came across a concrete construction partially blocking a stream and associated pool. Questions were raised as to its use and one knowledgeable walker told us how soldiers have to crawl through this tunnel full of water as part of their Marines training. At East Budleigh Common we stopped for coffee in a sheltered copse within Wheathill Plantation. This was followed by a steady walk along Hayes Lane, where at its crest we stopped and enjoyed views over East Budleigh, Otterton and beyond to Portland Bill.

We then turned south for a short walk onto Shortwood Common where we were able to see the effects of not managing a common. The rampant brambles and bracken were the results of letting nature do its thing. After lunch we walked through Dalditch Common, across Inner Ting Tong and into Dalditch Plantation. At the point where Squabmoor Reservoir was clearly visible Haylor Lass gave us a run down on the history and purpose of the reservoir that is now used exclusively for recreational purposes.

We exited the plantation onto a minor road and over a stile/gate into Withcombe Raleigh Common, a little known area that is in the main managed by the RSPB (Aylesbeare). Bystock Fishponds (originally 19thC reservoirs) managed by The Devon Wildlife Trust. Bystock Nature Reserve was our next point of call.

Within the Reserve we walked along "The Valley", emerging onto Wrights Lane. From there we headed north onto Lympstone Common and proceeding in a northerly direction we clipped the edge of Coombe Common (not on the OS map) and the eighth and last common. From this point the walk proceeded northwards across Black Hill, alongside water filled quarry workings and across Bicton Common and Woodbury Common back to the car park.

At the end of the walk, walkers commented that many of the places that they had visited were new to them, others expressed pleasure at the variety of terrains that they had walked over and flora that they had seen. Many thanks to the Pebble Bed Heath Trust for facilitating this walk and to the OVA for putting it together.

Backmarker

Exe Valley Way Stage V – Bampton to Dulverton - 1st August 2015

A Stylish Walk

Having discovered that the bus connections on the return journey looked very iffy, most of us decided that the best solution was to share a car to Bampton, do the walk and take the bus back to Bampton. After a little confusion as to the correct bus stop for the start of the walk, 14 of us plus Kim, the dog, set off up the first hill from the village of Bampton. Five stiles were negotiated very quickly together with the main part of the day's inclines.

There were lots of sheep and the views were delightful. Ominous dark clouds loomed ahead and we were soon putting on our wet weather gear as a quick shower passed our way. We passed an unusually shaped toll house and entered Exebridge where we said goodbye to the Exe river which disappeared north and wouldn't be seen again until we reached our destination on Exmoor on a later stage.

We crossed the railway bridge and soon reached the village of Brushford. Looking up the history of the village, it was named as Brigeford in the Domesday book survey of 1086. In the 19th and 20th Centuries, Bampton, Brushford and Dulverton enjoyed the contact of the Barnstaple to Taunton and Tiverton Railway but sadly no more.

We had a quick look at the weir as we were passing. It has recently been established that the historic water-power system was once a far more important and industrially busy place than previously believed. The ancient history of the weir and leat date back to 1331 and was in use up to the 20th century. The leat was the medieval equivalent of a modern power plant. This lasted until it was discovered that coal was the cheaper option. In 1791 the local residents were chiefly employed in the manufacture of coarse woollens and blankets. This was all uncovered when renovation and research was recently carried out after the flood damage of 2013/14.

A lunch stop on a river bridge over the River Barle at last arrived in time for us to refresh and complete the last 1.5 easy miles into Dulverton. Our thanks to Chris and Mike for making this delightful stage of about 6 miles such a pleasure.

Heather Fereday

An Ode to the Otterton High Peak Walk - 11th August 2015

“14 Walkers and then there were 8!”

We started the walk from Otterton Green.

A group of fine walkers appeared on the scene.

Several had travelled on the 157 bus

Having disembarked with a minimum of fuss.

Well it could have proved dangerous, off-loading passengers with sticks

But they all appeared harmless, in fact a very pleasant mix!

By the bank of The Otter alongside Anchoring Hill, we encountered a ‘4 bar fence’!

We all climbed over with reasonable ease, using a ‘smidgen of common sense’.

Just after that point one walker dropped out, we were sorry to see him go.

But turning eastwards towards Sea View Farm, a place most of us seemed to know.

Then after Bar’s Lane we took the short climb, ending up on the top of High Peak.

I think at that point some were thinking ahead, of visiting a local pub

Where they could ‘down’ a delicious cool pint and consume some decent ‘pub grub’.

Still down the stony path we scrambled, which fortunately was reasonably wide.

And as luck would have it, we all got down and amazingly nobody died!

We passed the sandstone stacks in the sea, walking down to Ladram Bay

Where several of our stalwart group, went along the ‘convenience’ way.

Much relieved, we all went on our way, passing via Monks Wall.

We didn’t know that in a very short while, again our numbers would fall.

A second walker took a short cut when we arrived at Colliver Cross

She had to catch an earlier bus home, so that was another sad loss!

At last we made it to Clamour Bridge, where again our numbers went down

As four of our group went on their own way but left without expressing a frown!

We were now on the final stretch of our hike, with only 8 of us left

But we think everyone enjoyed their walk, and didn’t leave feeling bereft.

Back on The Green we said our goodbyes to two who left to go home.

Whilst the final six went to The Kings Arms, having lost their appetite to roam.

Where we enjoyed a drink and a tasty bite and passed away the time.

Which is just as well, that now at last, I can finish this awful rhyme!

Jean Gannon

Exe Valley Way Stage VI – Dulverton to Withypool – 15 August

A walk alongside the River Barle

This was one of a series of walks, exploring the Exe Valley. As it was my first, I was ‘volunteered’ to write this report. Unlike earlier walks, public transport was

not an option so the first challenge was getting walkers to the start and cars to the end of the walk – a task masterminded with aplomb by one of the walk leaders and a spreadsheet. The plus side for the non-drivers was the time we had (while awaiting the return of the drivers) to sample the delights of Dulverton, be that the good coffee shop, the fine church with a 13th century tower or the Heritage Centre.

Eventually a dozen walkers set off for the 9.5 mile stretch of the walk which turned out to be not along the Exe Valley but along the valley of the River Barle. The reason for this was initially obscure to the writer (though it later transpired that, at this stage, the Exe Valley offers poor walking- only along a busy road or through steeply-sloping woods). But I was assured that the next and final walk would take the group from Withypool (on the River Barle) to the Head of the River Exe!

Be that as it may, the Barle (a tributary of the Exe) provided good walking country for the first half of our walk. After the initial climb, offering views across Dulverton, we walked mostly through woods and more or less on the level. In fact, some of the way was right beside the river (although at this point the path became quite overgrown and we began to doubt our leaders' ability to find the path they had reced. When they told us lunch was not scheduled for another hour, there was mutiny in the ranks and a late coffee stop was called for – and enjoyed (it was a scenic spot!)

Revived and with a new confidence in our leaders and their respect for democracy, we struck out enthusiastically for Hawkridge. Again, the going was good as we climbed up above the river, ignoring tempting signs which beckoned us towards Tarr Steps, the only well-known spot in the area which, in their wisdom, our leaders had determined to avoid. Finally, we emerged into the open and there before us was Hawkridge Church. We readily tucked into our picnic lunches on the edge of the churchyard, enjoying the fine view towards Exmoor via West Anstey and Molland Commons. Some of us took time to explore the church or to trace local family names on the tombstones. The sun even shone on us briefly.

The second half of the walk was a nice contrast. Skirting Hawkridge Common we were soon out into the open. Over Parsonage Down (with more signs attempting to lure us down to Tarr Steps – possibly a focus for a future walk?), we proceeded to cross West Water and then the Two Moors Way took us north.

Views now were across rolling farmland and on up towards moorland to the north and east.

A last climb and when we crossed the cattle grid, we felt this must at last be Exmoor. Indeed almost immediately a group of Exmoor ponies – four or five adults and two smallish foals, appeared from the gorse bushes, tossing their manes and crossing the path behind us. In fact, this was Withypool Hill. We rounded its shoulder and then looked and headed down to our destination, Withypool itself. As we took the bridge across the River Barle, holidaymakers were bathing in the river (perhaps the “Pool”), the sun came out and we strode on, thankfully, to rest and refresh ourselves at the Tea Rooms which signalled the end of our route. A great day’s Exe Valley walk along the River Barle!

Jean Quinn

Belstone and the Taw Valley – 19 August

This is a walk that takes in the best that Dartmoor has to offer – outstanding scenery, expansive views, challenging walking, ancient archaeology, industrial heritage, classic tors, and this being August, wind and rain!

The forecast was gloomy and as seven walkers and one dog met in the car park at Belstone, we knew the forecasters had got it right. Undeterred, we set off through the village heading south following the river up the valley. The Taw was crossed by the ford, a major test of how waterproof our boots really were as the water level reflected the recent rain. We followed the track up White Hill, crossing marshy ground, to the White Hill hut circle settlement. This provided a good spot to pause for coffee to admire the Iron Age huts and the wonderful vista over the river valley. On reaching the summit by Little Hound Tor we came to the Bronze Age White Hill Stone circle. Nearby was the White Moor Stone, believed to be a standing stone associated with the Stone Circle, but more recently used as a boundary marker for three parishes. The initials of each are carved on it, TP for Tawton Parish, T for Throwleigh, and DC for Duchy of Cornwall.

Leaving the circle we headed south toward Hound Tor. High up, on a saddle between two river valleys we were fully exposed to the wind and rain. On a clear day Hound Tor offers stunning views over North and East Devon and the ridge can be seen from Peak Hill. Onwards from Hound Tor, branching South West, a walk across rough ground brought us down to the Steeperton Brook, another

tributary of the Tor. After crossing the brook, shelter from the wind and an ideal spot for lunch was found in the well preserved remains of a tinnery hut.



Belstone Tor

Onwards south westerly, skirting Steeperton Tor, we passed the remains of the Knack Mine and then turned back north following the Steeperton gorge. The track then took us along the ridge line past Oak Tor, Higher Tor, Irishman's Wall, Belstone Tor, to Belstone common. As the weather slowly lifted, the whole ridge offered fine views to the East over the Taw Valley and the West towards the East Okement river, Yes Tor and

Higher Willhayes. This culminated on Belstone common with dramatic views over North Devon across to Exmoor.

The final section of the walk took us down the rock strewn slopes to the Nine Maidens cairn circle. Then back into Belstone village, with a visit to the church to view the rare ring cross carved into a large slab of Dartmoor granite dated to the 7th - 9th century. And then of course a warm welcome at the Tors pub, well earned after a wonderful walk in some challenging circumstances with fine company.

George Norman

Exe Valley Way Stage VII - Withypool to Exehead – 22nd August The longest walk to the finishing line

We'd gone to bed anticipating a very wet and wild walk on Exmoor, but by the time we set off the next day from Withypool, for the 12 mile, and final stage of this epic journey, the sun was out and we enjoyed a warm dry day. Warm enough for a fetching, Wimbledon style headband to make its debut.

Like so many stages before it, this one started with an uphill climb out of the village. (150 metres of ascent) Those of us who had public spiritedly taken cars to the end of the route for the return journey (no public transport: no pressure!), had to endure the smug boasts of the rest who had been indulging themselves at the delightful café in Withypool, and stocked up with celebratory rock cakes to eat later. We joined the Two Moors Way looking down the valley of the Barle as

it flowed under the beautiful Landacre Bridge and cameras were pointed at quite breathtaking views.

After about 3 miles, the path drops down to the riverside for some easy walking into Simonsbath. The pace had been swift at 2.7 miles per hour and lunch in the sun, in the restored Ashcombe Community garden on proper bench seats, or on tanned grass in the shade of a gigantic Copper Birch, was welcome. Some ate their rock cakes. The headband, though not its owner, was hung up to dry.

We'd completed 6½ miles in the morning, and now, rested and refuelled we set off to tackle the 2½ miles to the source of the River Exe. Those of us of a certain age know that getting comfortable before exercise is not advisable, and as, inevitably, we dragged ourselves up Ashcombe Bottom (another 120 metres of boggy ascent), it was the driver's turn to feel self-satisfied, as the pace dropped and rock cakes did not seem like a good idea after all. But, we soon picked up as we walked briskly over open moor, on top of the world, with views of folded hills, coombes and valleys in every direction, in the company of a group of walkers who had shared each other's idiosyncrasies for 60 miles. One was moved to announce that "it doesn't get better than this!"

Excited with anticipation, the group spread out like a police sweep for evidence, as we continued to climb Dure Down, one of those featureless rounded hill tops that needs a Dartmoor Tor to give it a focus. "What are we looking for?" said one on all fours with a magnifying glass. "You'll know by the bright lights and 'Kiss me quick' hats, when you've found it", said others helpfully. And then, suddenly, the wait was over. Nestling in a small hollow, at the convergence of several hillocks, flowing innocently and unobtrusively, like water out of a bath tap, was the source of the River Exe that had chosen to make its exit to the sea over 50 miles to the south, rather than in the nearby Bristol Channel (pic inside front cover).

The celebrations began! Ritually, some drank the cool, pure liquid, some bathed in its restorative waters; others could not believe the extent of their achievement and became emotional, while those with technology to hand wondered if this really was the end. But everyone drank Champagne! On the return leg from Exehead, in between the showers, we were treated to a classic view of Exmoor to raise our spirits for the last mile or so.

Job done, but where now to tempt us out of the Otter valley?

Chris Buckland

Summer Evening Strolls in the Otter Valley



At the time that this series of evening walks around our villages was planned, the anticipation was for balmy, sunny evenings, watching the sun dipping behind rolling hills and distant views to sea. Well, only East Budleigh met this brief. Thank you.

Otterton should hang its head in shame: we started in the rain and it just got heavier. At least you provided a dry sanctuary in the Kings Arms afterwards. Colaton Raleigh was cloudy and very humid, while Newton Poppleford gave us hints of the sun after 3 days unrelenting rain. But no matter, since Walkers have taken anything that is thrown at them, during this largely dismal summer.

As we made our way along paths, tracks and quiet lanes we were reminded of why we like to live here and why we occasionally take umbrage, when we think the countryside is threatened by a developer who does not share our sensitivity. We even managed to find the occasional path off the beaten track but never more than a mile from our start. I particularly remember the view from Yonder Hill of High Peak, framed by overhanging trees. It was at this point on our circumnavigation of Colaton, with darkness falling and 'last orders' being called that the group spurned my suggestion to take the scenic (and ever so slightly longer!) route home. Instead we continued on Shepherd's Lane, discussing the merits of the Grand Designs that reside along there. High Peak featured on all our walks, keeping a watchful eye on our progress.

We may live in the country but some of our through roads can get busy and dangerous to cross. So we ensured that we had plenty of practices where paths emerged hidden from traffic by sharp bends or summits. By the time of our last stroll we were experts, and needed to be to cross the 'big daddy' of them all. Yes, the A3052! Relishing the opportunity to don his OVA hi-viz jacket, the walk leader assumed the role of lollipop lady and everyone got across safely, in front of Goosemoor Farm. Our reward was a delightful and barely visible path across lush, long meadow grass and, tempted by dusky bird calls, we entered and skirted Harpford Common on our way to Newton Pop.

Groups walking along the Otter, north of Otterton Bridge, are polarising into those who have seen the Beavers and those who believe it is just a rumour,

cultivated by the Devon Tourist Board to lure gullible visitors to East Devon. And we had representatives from both camps on our strolls when there were no sightings (again!). However, we did see a sign that I thought we might never see again. Runner beans advertised at a “£1 a lb”. We were informed that they were cheaper in East Budleigh village shop, but I bet they were sold by the kilo, so couldn’t possibly taste as good.

We also saw Clinton Farms massive slurry pit on our way back to Colaton. Some were sceptical that it could deliver odour free ‘slurry’ as they claimed, since where they live “the smell was awful.” Next door was SW Waters’ “Tank” as it says on the map. Although OVA Members could all climb the fence, there was an interesting series of 5 interlocking padlocks on the gate appearing to offer a height of security only witnessed at Guantanamo. One of the group, who photographed and subsequently researched the evidence, reported back on the last walk that what we had seen was a “Taylock”, a clever device, incorporating 5 different padlocks, although opening one would disable the remainder. Incidentally, our researcher gets a gold star for being the only person to attend all four Strolls, although probably under duress since she has just moved to East Budleigh, where she found herself a neighbour of the OVA Village Rep and Walk Leader. Apparently, he knocked on her door, not with a pot of tea, but with threats that she should join the OVA forthwith and attend all the evening walks! It was good to welcome several new or lapsed walkers: some as young as 10 who had been bribed and who were let down to discover that you can’t get an ice cream in the pub at 9pm! Others brought local knowledge and a local perspective on ‘their’ village.

Our final sojourn brought yet more new experiences as, holding hands in the dark, we felt our way along a devious set of paths from Back Lane, to emerge opposite The Cannon where the Beer Festival had started without us. A celebratory end to our re-acquaintance with the Otter Valley and an opportunity to discuss suggestions for improvements to next years Summer Evening Strolls. To cap it all, and because we had enjoyed walking in the dark so much, one of our Walk Leaders promised to lead a night walk next year!

Chris Buckland

The Otter Valley Association

Executive Committee (01395)

| | | |
|---------------|-------------------|--------|
| Chairman | Roger Saunders | 443248 |
| Vice-chairman | Haylor Lass | 568786 |
| Hon Secretary | <i>vacancy</i> | |
| Hon Treasurer | Trevor Waddington | 443978 |

Committee Chairmen

| | | |
|---------------------|------------------|--------|
| Natural Environment | Patrick Hamilton | 445351 |
| Planning | Nicola Daniel | 445960 |
| History | David Daniel | 445960 |
| Events | <i>vacancy</i> | |

Parish Representatives (to whom queries should be addressed initially)

| | | |
|--------------------|------------------|--------|
| Budleigh Salterton | George Maddaford | 446077 |
| East Budleigh | Jon Roseway | 488739 |
| Otterton | <i>vacancy</i> | |
| Colaton Raleigh | <i>vacancy</i> | |
| Newton Poppleford | Haylor Lass | 568786 |

Other Executive Committee Members

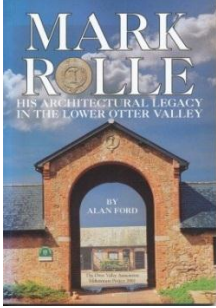
| | | |
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| Assistant Minutes Secretary | Robert Wiltshire | 444395 |
| Membership Secretary | Clive Bowman membership@ova.org.uk | 446892 |
| Publicity Secretary | <i>vacancy</i> | |

Other Contacts

| | | |
|-------------------------|--|------------------|
| Webmasters | David Daniel 445960 & Martin Smith | 442333 |
| Talks Organiser | Graham Knapton | 445872 |
| Walks Organisers | Chris Buckland Mike Paddison | 444471 446550 |
| Newsletter Distributors | Pam and Tony Harber | 445392 |
| Newsletter Editor | Jacqui Baldwin jacquibaldwin@btinternet.com | 567599 |

Publications: Visit www.ova.org.uk or for book sales, contact Andrew Beresford by phone on 01395 446543 or email booksales@ova.org.uk

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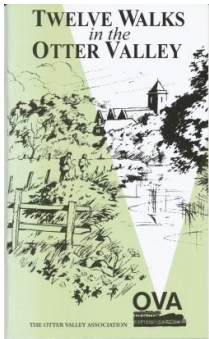


Mark Rolle

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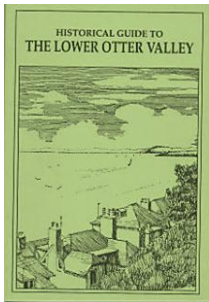
£4.95 from your village rep (or plus £2.00 P&P)



Twelve Walks in the Otter Valley.

The area of the Lower Otter Valley is covered by a network of footpaths, mostly waymarked and in good condition. OVA members have compiled these walks, each with clear directions and illustrated with a sketch map. They range from 4 mile easy walks to a more energetic 9½ miler. There are notes on places of interest to whet your appetite for further exploration.

£3.00 from your village rep (or plus £2.00 P&P)



Historical Guide to the Lower Otter Valley

Want to know more about the area you live in or are visiting? This book is packed with detailed information about the places, buildings, people and natural history of this beautiful area, from the very earliest times to the end of the 20th century.

£3.50 from your village rep (or plus £2.00 P&P)

Leaflets

The OVA also publish a number of leaflets about the history, flora & fauna and walking in the lower Otter Valley. They can usually be found in the Tourist Information Centre and in other outlets around the valley.