

OVA Walk on Wednesday 17th December 2014 with Chris Buckland

'A GLASS HALF EMPTY' or was it 'A GLASS HALF FULL'

Things did not start well. In a brazen attempt to ingratiate himself with the group, the Walk Leader described them as 'elite' and consequently in no need of his usual briefing about the walk's terms and conditions. Most were flattered, as was intended, but a member of the OVA's Executive, posing as a 'mystery shopper' was heard to mutter something about 'Health and Safety protocols' and the 'invalidating of the Association's Insurance cover.' Etc, etc.

We had only reached the pub (3 minutes), when it transpired that one of the group, the one who self-confessed to 'falling out of bed at five to ten' (the walk had been due off at 10 am), had not brought any lunch. But this is what a village shop is for, so a packet of biscuits and a bottle of water were purchased, although she won't get away with it again. Sadly, the shop will close in the New Year.

Another sucker was inveigled to carry the spoils.

Half way to West Down Beacon, we veered to the west to use the route of the old railway line to make quick progress (2.6 mph to be precise!) to Littleham Church; so quick that the obligatory coffee break was spurned. But what's this? A dissenting voice, and order was soon restored and coffee imbibed. You might think that one among eight had a disproportionate effect on the democratic process, but we live in changing times, where the authority of the rich, and the powerful and Walk Leaders is being challenged. At least the biscuits were offered round, and those being half coated plain chocolate ones, were well received.

Meanwhile, the Walk Leader was harangued because he was unable to deliver a Powerpoint lecture on 'Littleham Church and it's efficacy as a fifteenth century pilgrimage for OVA walkers'. Fortunately, he saved himself by remembering that Lady Nelson was buried there, and another, even more knowledgeable walker, knew exactly where to look, so we minced around the headstones to view. Since no more biscuits were forthcoming, and the Executive member had failed to repeat last year's seasonal offering of mulled wine, we went on our way.

There followed some attractive rural paths alongside Littleham's babbling brook (oh yes it was!), although the spectre of Exmouth's urbanisation brooded over us on the hill tops above. We didn't follow the brook all the way to the sea, but crossed it to the south and climbed to the cliffs at Higher Orcombe, before gliding down to Orcombe Point; the start of the Jurassic Coast at its most westerly point, and recognised by the Geoneedle. Although a somewhat modest location for such a world renowned geological phenomenon, one tries to be sympathetic

towards visitors who want to record their presence at this iconic landmark. Fortunately, the OVA's dignity was just about preserved, since no one tried to climb to the top, probably because there wasn't a traffic cone to hand, and no mulled wine had been consumed. Instead, advantage was taken of the attractively landscaped seating and we all cosied up to eat our lunch and enjoy the captivating views of the Exe Estuary. A pair of kestrels hovered close by.

It was mild, but nonetheless if you had forgotten your string vest, you were keen not to hang about (although we contrived to hang about for 52 minutes on this walk!) and sure enough the cry came that we should begin the 3 mile climb along the South West Coast Path to West Down Beacon. No more biscuits, so we concurred. En route we diverted our gaze as we hurried past multitudes of mobile holiday homes, pausing briefly, with our backs firmly set to this blight on the landscape, to gaze at a deserted Sandy Bay beach. An appropriately short, sharp, shock of a climb took us uphill past the Commandoes training camp at Straight Point, before that familiar view of Otter Head hove into view. We skipped along the crumbling cliff edge on the already rerouted path, before the next landslip occurred, to reach the view from 129 metres above sea level and 260 metres of ascent.

Downhill now. We'd done 7 miles and the sign said 'Knowle 1 mile', but not before one of the group began to get the shakes as we skirted the golf course. All those 'pulls' and 'slices' from Christmases past, coming back to haunt her. And then it was all over. 4:01 hours after we left, we were back at the pub. 3 minutes after closing time!

Chris Buckland (bon vivant and part-time raconteur. Ed)
19th December 2014