

Wednesday, 15th July 2015, The Coastal Path with Chris Buckland

'Familiarity breeds content(ment)!'

We were alarmed at the start of our walk on 15th July 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 conversations 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 of barley.

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 (more exciting species were to come!). 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. Chris allowed us to believe that we knew the way into Otterton but instead struck off on a track unknown to the rest of the group alongside the cricket field. Andrew was now promoted to lead the walk and set a lively pace, looking purposeful, but our confidence in him was soon shattered when he asked Chris whether this was the route they'd taken on a recent farm visit.

We headed towards Anchoing 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 Anchoing Cottage - a pretty "chocolate box" dwelling. We skirted Anchoing 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. 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
15 July 2015