

Wednesday, 29th July 2015, A Walk on Woodbury Common with Mike Paddison

"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 reconnoitered 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! Our walk leader eventually breathed a sigh of relief after remembering there were only two stiles to climb en route. It was easy to note that 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 the Pebblebed Heath Week and the work of the Conservation Trust. A Walkers Guide, published by the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust, containing a description of six walks across the heaths were handed out at the beginning and the end of the walk.

This was followed by an opportunity that Chris Buckland 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.

Next was the walk leader's H&S patter and in particular an exhortation to be careful when crossing the roads. 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.

The walk 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. In the middle of this area 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 Tucker's Plants, we crossed the road into **East Budleigh Common** where we stopped for mid-morning coffee in a sheltered copse within Wheathill Plantation. The post coffee group photo is shown below.



This was followed by a steady walk along Hayes Lane, where at its crest we stopped and enjoyed the 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.

The next stop was for lunch in an area adjoining the Buzzard Route (Budleigh to Exmouth Cycleway). There someone had thoughtfully erected a tarpaulin shelter and placed logs around a central area. It was comfortable for about twenty people, but the rest of us found space in which to have our lunches.

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 immediately climbed over a style/gate into **Withcombe Raleigh Common**, a little known area that is in the main managed by the RSPB (Aylesbear).

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 the gravel distribution plant, through a small fir tree plantation, and across Bicton Common and Woodbury Common to back to Woodbury Castle car park.

At the end of the walk, many 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 guys for putting this walk together.

"Backmarker"
2nd August 2015