

Saturday, 10 October 2015, Crab Ledge & Colliver Cross with Chris Buckland

"When The Cat's Away"

On receiving the disappointing news that John Jones was unwell and unable to lead this walk, members expressed sympathy and wished him a speedy recovery; then the 'penny dropped'. They could do as they pleased! Anarchy broke out! Yours truly could not contain the enthusiasm with which it was decided to ***"walk the route in the opposite direction"***, no less! No longer would Salterton residents have to stride away from, and with their backs toward, their beloved town. Instead, they would be rewarded by delaying gratification until they returned over the cliffs, from east to west, with the town set out before them in all its majesty. Now, with power surging through every artery they could not be contained, and a second decision was taken to ***"walk north along Park Lane, overlooking the River Otter"***, rather than along the towpath! It was a very smug group that set off from White Bridge.

We soon reached The Warren that beautifully 'sculptured' hill rising up from the east bank of the Otter, crowned with three and a half fir trees, proud and visible from the East Budleigh Road. At which point the walk leader confessed how he had satisfied his desire to climb this iconic landmark, by trespassing one dank winter's afternoon, and in so doing narrowly avoided inducing a heart attack in a passing tractor driver.

In 1540 the manors of Otterton and East Budleigh were awarded to Richard Duke, in recognition of his work as clerk of the Augmentation Court, which organised the dissolution of the monasteries for Henry VIII. One of his families planned to build an imposing house in Otterton Park, reached by an avenue of trees wending their way up the hillside. The mansion was never built, but the grand entrance to the park still remains on Park Lane, in the form of two brick pillars, each capped with a stone acorn. Haylor mischievously suggested that they could be pineapples? We craned our neck but could not locate the avenue, although tantalisingly there is an indication of their continued existence on the OS Map.

As we left Colliver Cross, heading south towards Home Down Farm, Heather could contain herself no longer, and like the walk leader some 20 minutes before her, divulged her guilty secret. She had trespassed on private land (unknowingly, she said?) in a vain attempt to reach the coast path, and been threatened with a shot gun and driven away by the farmer. It is incursions like this that enhance our "right to roam", (remember Kinder Scout?) and when, one day, and perhaps not in our lifetime, this farmer should open his track to enable us to walk conveniently to the coast, then you will be remembered Heather.

Coincidentally, while Kate Ponting was contributing her interesting reference to "some unusual plants growing amongst the spring barley, near the coast path

above Otterton", on page 7 of the current Autumn Newsletter, we were stood on that very path between Stantway Lane and the Waste Treatment

Works. Even I could identify the Sunflowers, but the lilac/purple flowered plant had everyone guessing and photographing. Fortunately, our resident botanist was on hand and has provided this informative description to augment Kate's submission. Thank you, Ruth.

"Phacelia tanacetifolia is a member of the borage family, sometimes known in English as purple tansy. As growing here, it is often sown as a mixed seed with sunflower, sorghum, millet, etc as a winter food for wild or game birds. Phacelia seed can also be bought at your garden centre to grow for winter ground cover and green manure (dig it in spring)."

Fortunately for our peace of mind and the sense of order and familiarity that helps us to cope with never ending change, coffee was taken, as usual, at the WW II lookout at Brandy Head. This excellent renovation, provides rest, shelter, an informative interpretation board on its history, and splendid views over Lyme Bay; but why so parsimonious with the seating? Just one bench when there is an obvious place, and need on OVA walks, for a second. What a useful and appropriate project for the OVA to undertake. Now, who will help me carry the breeze blocks?

The highlight of the walk for me was the return westward along the cliff path, past Poolness Beach, Black Head, Coal Beach, and Danger Point to Otterton Head, with Budleigh Salterton always enticing us forward in the late morning autumn sunshine. I hope we didn't 'race' and miss anything on this four and a half mile route, but were able to enjoy the exercise and the beauty of the landscape, revelling in dry, mild weather, in good company. However, I think the optimistic and contented mood of the group, is reflected in the results achieved by Haylor's union with the satellites: a two hour 15 minute walk at an average moving speed of 2.88 miles per hour! If you would like to see where we went, our statistician has kindly submitted a map to accompany this article, on the OVA's Walk Reports website. *(Map to be uploaded later after licensing issues resolved. Ed)*

Chris Buckland
24 October 2015