

Monday, 19th October 201, SW Coastal Path with Chris Buckland

"THE GREAT TRESPASS"

By the time that you read this, the ten hardy souls who embarked on this initially innocent ramble through the lesser-known byways of the lower Otter valley could be quite famous, or possibly more famous than we want to be. Only time will tell!

At the outset, Chris' plan was very simple - an 8 mile wander out of East Budleigh and across the Otter to reach the coast just before Ladram. The walk would continue over High Peak and then turn back towards Otterton and then past the obelisk and back to the start.

Now that I think about it, our excitement at being intercepted at the very beginning of the walk by a photographer from the Exmouth Journal might have been rather misplaced, had we known how the day was going to unfold.

Reluctantly, we dutifully posed in the middle of the road, jostling for position, for a group photo, which we hoped at the time would make the front page at least, (a centrefold was beyond our wildest dreams!). Having put hairbrushes and make-up away, we eventually strode off into one of those still autumn days that you only really appreciate when you're out in it.

It immediately became clear to me that having walked in the Otter valley for over 35 years and thinking that I knew every path and bridleway - I was wrong.

I had been told at the outset that I had been volunteered to do the write-up for this walk and decided after 20 minutes that, because I had little idea where I was, the only thing for it would be to give a flavour of the day. Up to this point in time, that flavour was blackberries and I have to say that I was mightily impressed by the group's reluctance to stop and graze. This was not, however, to be a sign of things to come.

We eventually broke out onto the coast path above Ladram Bay, where Chris thought a coffee break would be in order so as to provide not only a rest before the ascent of High Peak, but also a run up, so to speak.

Suitably refuelled, we set off through the deserted complex and up the mountainside at a steady trudge. Chris' plan had worked - we had made the col before the summit without break - and only just behind a 12 year old who had been to the summit the day before and couldn't be bothered to go up again.

I have to say that I have never been to the top of High Peak before, largely because it was so thickly wooded in the past, but now the trees have gone it is a treat - and completely worth the awkward, stony final ascent. When I say that the views at the top are world class, I mean that on a still day with autumn sunshine breaking through to illuminate our wonderful valley and the coastline that frames it - there is nowhere else you would want to be.

It was clear that with such a view and the stumps of the felled trees to sit on, this was the place to take lunch. We munched away contentedly, lost in the views around us and little needed to be said.

However, we were on a summit and when a cool breeze began to blow, we decided to move on and along the undulating north eastern spur of the hill and back down to the main path, which we followed for a short while before turning sharply left and back in the direction of Otterton.

I cannot tell you exactly where it happened (partly because I don't know where I was and partly because if I did say, not that I could, persons with a vested interest in this location might want to talk to me, which could cause some problems.)

Anyway, one of our number said that he knew of a secret orchard which wasn't exactly open to the public. Having said that, it was kind of open as when we got there, the gate was open, which, when we peered in to see the beautiful trees laden with apples of all the lovely colours that only apples can be at this time of year, meant that "Chaaarge" .We lost control of ourselves. It became very obvious to me that I was in the midst of some very experienced scrumpers who knew their varieties and wanted to take them home. It was a beautiful old abandoned orchard in the middle of nowhere and had been completely abandoned. We were doing these apples a favour. We were giving them a home.

It now became apparent as to why Chris had the largest rucksack of all of us. Being hugely experienced, it must have occurred to him many years ago that If one was ever on a walk and one was to suddenly stumble across something that one really wanted and could take away - the bigger the rucksack- the more of that something one could have.

We eventually decided that enough was enough and once three of us had helped Chris on with his pack, we moved on towards Otterton. Chris was now unable to lead in a physical way, but spiritually, we knew he was with us, stooped under his burden.

Teas and coffees were duly ordered, the only blip being the rogue apple that escaped from Chris' pack and rolled across the picnic bench. There, we said our goodbyes to Ian, who decided that that was the final straw and his cover had been blown.

Off we trotted, across the Otter bridge, and up the narrow path that led to the chapel built by lady Rolle in the ground of Bickton gardens.

It was on the way to this landmark, that the second 'off road' incursion occurred. Two of our number knew of a very old secret walled garden, neglected for years, but beginning to be loved by its owners. We followed its cob wall until a small wooden gate, fastened by a log and a tyre, was located.

We gingerly shuffled into a windless haven, raised beds full of orange pumpkins and walls bearing the remnants of very old fruit trees. A new greenhouse had been built alongside the old one. Somebody was beginning to love this place again. Chris was trying to work out how many apples he would have to discard to fit in one of the pumpkins. We decided that it was time to leave this place.

Having crossed the road and passed the obelisk through a field, Chris took us on a shortcut to avoid a short walk along a lane. He assured us that this time, we truly were trespassing, which was a relief to all.

We finally crossed the East Budleigh football pitch to say farewell to two more of our number whose house bordered the playing field.

Chris looked in vain for a gap in their fence, but they assured him that there was a gate and a garden path round the other side of the house.

Returning to our cars, we said our thank yous and goodbyes, and made off like the clappers!!!!

Chris Gooding.

19th October 2015