

Saturday, 28 November 2015, A Short Walk around the Commons with the "Reserves Team"

"IN THE MOOD"

Waiting, innocently for the anticipated arrival of their Walk Leader the group spontaneously demonstrated their shared resolve and determination to 'beat the opposition' (see your favourite team sport pre-match ritual) by linking arms and waists to form an interlocking circle of strength. Grabbing the Conch, Bettina stepped into this cauldron, to conduct a political discussion on the abilities, competence and integrity of our standing MP, Hugo Swire and Independent Candidate, Claire Wright, who challenged him at the last election.

There was much wailing and gnashing of teeth when the assembled group realised that Mike and Chris were not David and Nicola, who coincidentally were attending a reception to celebrate the launch of the publication of a book charting the rise and rise of the ultimately unsuccessful, local Independent Councillor.

If it wasn't enough pressure to follow in the steps of David's illustrious reputation, and his confident assertion that this walk would "Improve your mood", there was the not insignificant demand from some, "to complete the walk before the arrival of the storm", forecast for that afternoon. Rising to the responsibility thrust upon these 'rookie' leaders, they set off undaunted, reaching a full 250 metres, before needing to confer. Fortunately, the satellites had come out to play and smoothed our path in a (roughly) southerly direction towards Squabmore Reservoir, along delightful wooded paths, enclosed in late autumn colour and allowing childish leaf kicking underfoot.

North and west now, flirting with Withycombe Common, where a popular and much loved location for a coffee stop, providing all the comfort of wet, knobby logs to sit on, and within touching distance of a group of mealy mouthed Exmoor ponies, was spurned in favour of a "better class of seat" at Bystock Ponds, our next destination. There was excited anticipation among some, who remembered seeing Terrapins on their last visit to this peaceful Devon Wildlife Trust site; but today we were greeted by just one lonely duck, of indeterminate ancestry.

More problematical, however, was the realisation that for all of its magnificence, the seat would only hold six people of modest girth on the lower level, but the twelve of us would be accommodated if those in the circle sat on the laps of those in the stalls. The third, and chosen way, was for everyone to stand and no one to sit down; although pragmatist Jacqui slipped away to enjoy the comfort of her very own private seat. She probably lay down.

Our watery theme took us to the north and uphill to the fringe of the ever expanding, scoured and corrugated landscape of the, "you won't know we've been here", Blackhill Quarry. A few steps on the East Devon Way, before a gentle downhill stroll, with distant views to High Peak and the walks' conclusion.

Mike, determined to prove all the doubters wrong, announced triumphantly, that we had returned the entire group to the starting point of the walk. Resident cynic Tony was not impressed, preferring to believe that our safe return was a stroke of good fortune and that Mike's enthusiasm for our success, masked a deep sense of relief.

Chris Buckland
30 November 2015