

**Tuesday, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2015, Lower Sweetcombe and Harcombe  
with David Buss**

***"Beyond Sidmouth - the sequel"***

The day looked promising with unseasonably mild temperatures and 11 walkers gathered at a pub car park in Sidford. An excellent starting point as it gave the promise of potential rewards a few hours later.

The party leader described the walk as a typical Devon countryside in autumn walk with guaranteed mud (but not too much).

A military helicopter flew low overhead at this point so we lost a bit of the briefing.

Soon the main road gave way to the back lanes and great countryside. The leader was doing an excellent job in pointing out the landmarks. The first was Boswell House, but his description of the property was soon taken on by a woman in the driveway who obliged by giving us a potted history of the ancient site and the C17 minor manor house. We proceeded to Knowle House (not to be confused with EDDC headquarters) and then upwards into woodland.

The walk had some fine views across the valley. There was some debate about the antiquity of a shaped piece of flint found on the track but the idea of a 'Neolithic' find was questioned.

Progress along muddy tracks was steady but not rapid. The group was keen to push on and declined the leader's considerate suggestion of a coffee break at one third distance. Finally the planned resting point arrived at nearly half way but a decision was needed - continue and maybe be too late for a pub lunch or take a short cut involving an untested footpath across the valley which might be flooded. The risk and adventure appealed and the slight deviation was approved. It was wet but no worse than before and the stream had a good bridge.

The return leg was via Harcombe Hill and through Harcombe Wood with some excellent views of surrounding countryside and a glimpse of the sea in the distance. The architectural heritage included the leader's particular favourite - Beaconsgate (formerly the keepers cottage to Sidbury manor and designed by Charles Cave in 1894 in the Arts and Crafts style). There was a discussion about the unusual 'battered buttresses' but for one person the term evoked the thoughts of food so the pace noticeably quickened as we descended back to Sidford. To match the quality of the buildings the natural environment got a look in as a 'Brimstone' butterfly was spotted (one of only a few butterflies to spend the winter in adult form).

Back in time and a fine 7 mile walk on a cloudy but warm day. Not sure many noticed but the low flying helicopter flew back over Sidford the other way as we left.

*Jim Pithouse*

*7<sup>th</sup> December 2015*