

Saturday 30 January 2016 - "Two Rivers Way" - a Walk with Mike Paddison

The Magnificent Seven's ~~Plan A~~ ~~Plan B~~ Plan C

The advertised Walk from Stoke Canon was to be along the Exe Valley Way, along the banks of the River Exe, along the Devonshire Heartland Way, crossing several tributaries of the River Exe, and along the River Creedy to Newton St Cyres and lunch at The Beer Engine. The instructions were to meet Exeter Bus Station at 9.45am for the outward bus at 10:00am.

Penny and I had our first experience of the Park and Ride into Exeter and had had the foresight to get an "explorer" ticket which would give us unlimited travel on "all Stagecoach buses across the South West". We arrived at the Bus Station with time to go into the Travel Centre to try and get some clarity on the types of bus tickets available. The man behind the desk explained that I could have got a Senior Explorer ticket as I am over 60 and saved £1.20! He then proceeded to explain about Stagecoach's new Bus Station and Centre whereby he would be out of work as there would be no Travel Centre facility and that everyone will have to buy their tickets on-line.

After this devastating news, could things get any worse? We met up with Mike and Paula, Chris, Graham and Peter for Mike to tell us that things were in fact worse - the River Exe had flood warnings and that the Two Rivers Way (Plan A) was not an option as sections of the planned walk would be under water. Mike glossed over Plan B as this too was not feasible due to the rain and further flooding higher up the River Exe; however, Plan C was viable and that we would get a bus at 10.00 to Newton St Cyres instead of the planned bus to Stoke Canon. Plan C was a high-level six mile walk with views over the River Exe and it might be a bit muddy!

Once the driver was on board, we leapt into the bus like excited schoolchildren and rushed upstairs to 'bags' the front seats. At least this meant that we had a good view of where we were going once we had wiped the condensation off the windows! 15 minutes later, just as everyone was beginning to get comfortable, it was time to get off in Newton St Cyres. Mike explained that the village comprised two parts - one section along the main road where we were and the other half a mile away by the station and The Beer Engine. Before Chris could ask, I volunteered to do the walk report and take some photos.



We set off at 10.25 past a garden filled with gnomes, meerkats and other stone fauna and within 20 metres Mike veered off the road to collect a 'Country Walks Newton St Cyres' pamphlet - we all followed suit. A chap said that he was pleased to see the pamphlets being taken as he was the author - it transpired that we were going to do Walk 2. Roger Wilkins, for that was his name, declined the opportunity to join us on the walk but he did mention that the wild boars had disappeared and that it could be "slightly wet underfoot".

As we ascended the road, Graham recounted some of his adventures in Antarctica. At the top of the hill, Chris outlined the walk which was to go along a ridge to a radio mast and then around and back to Newton St Cyres. We left the road onto our first mid-Devon brown muddy track and descended to the Blake River.



The path ascended steeply before following field boundaries - Peter commented that the walk 'was not muddy but squelchy' and Penny compared the uphill to going up sand dunes (in terms of effort, not moisture content!).

From the fields, we came to a 'quiet lane'; this provided an opportunity to stride out having marvelled at some of the fungi on a dead tree. We followed signs towards Venny Cleave and Sherwood but then descended into Northridge Copse to sample some of the claggy muddy paths through Sherwood and then Whiptail Wood which provided a respite from the cloying mud as it was mainly pine trees so we had a needle-cushioned path to help us on our ascent. At another turning point and another discussion about where to go, Chris mentioned coffee: democracy deemed that we should finish the ascent and imbibe in the sunlight. 20 minutes later we had a well-earned break. In a 'senior moment' probably brought about by fatigue, Chris suggested that there ought

to be a choir of angels singing "Hallelujah".

The sun warmed us but then the cold wind picked up as we picked our way across more energy sapping muddy fields. We spotted some frog spawn in one of the puddles and marvelled at Nature and her optimism. We emerged onto a road where talk turned to our average speed and actual pace as we discussed the East Devon Way 24 hour challenge in June.



We had a good stretch out past the mast on Rowland Road but then had to almost double back on ourselves onto an uphill quagmire

of boot-high, gloopy mud - the wood chippings strewn along the path did little to absorb the ankle deep water. At the top of the hill, Mike marvelled at how clean Paula's boots were ... the rest of us had mud encased boots and gaiters! We descended into Newton Wood and into a new category of muddiness When discussing the potential of finding as many ways of describing mud in a walk report, Chris stated that the report did not have to be factual and could be about anything ... another made-up walk entirely or the meal that we were going to have - surely Mississippi mud pie would be on the menu!!!

We entered Coombland Wood where large tractors had carved deep tracks in the pathway - mud took on many different guises: thick sloppy slime, stagnant path-side, and sneaky mud hiding under

water ... we reached a point where we were faced with an extensive stretch of path that was underwater or six inches of slime: I thought that we could go round the edge so Mike ploughed on into boot high slimy, watery goo - we didn't follow him this time. With hindsight, we should have left the path and walked in the field the other side of the hedge! We met the tarmac at Tinpit Hill and caught tantalising glimpses of Newton St Cyres as we descended. On the outskirts, was the ford to the Shuttern Brook, Mike produced a brush and cleaned his gaiters and boots; the rest of us tried to rub the mud off boots in the water but this mid-Devon mud is tenacious and would not budge!

We got to the bus stop and the sign stated that it was half a mile to The Beer Engine by this time (13.30) Penny's stomach rumblings were audible! We crossed the River Creedy which was in full flow but not above its banks and reached the pub, An outdoor (water) tap provided another opportunity to remove this stubborn brown stuff from boots and gaiters; and finally in the first pint disappeared very quickly. The meal was excellent, substantial and freshly cooked; a second pint helped with the relaxation and recovery; Penny and I shared a Devon apple and blackberry crumble whilst Chris was persuaded to have the warm brownie. Peter regaled us with tales of his accident where a car came the other way round a roundabout and smashed into him ... Paula mentioned that the other walk (Plan A) was a much better walk than today's Plan C.

The half mile back to the bus stop flashed by and the bus to Exeter arrived within five minutes - great planning Mike.

Paul Kurowski

4th February 2016

PS there was no Mississippi Mud Pie on offer.