

Friday 22 April 2016, Weston Combe & Branscombe

“THINGS TO DO ON A FRIDAY MORNING.”

Baking, cleaning the car, cooking, cutting the grass, dusting, going to the gym, ironing, shopping, washing, are all activities that don't get done when there is an OVA walk on a Friday morning. And so it was that a group of self-indulgent, pleasure seeking, hedonists set off from wet and wonderful Weston and headed for the sea.

After a couple of hundred yards, a delightful wild flower strewn permissive path took us the half mile to the top of Western Cliff and a spectacular view of the Mouth below and High Peak in the distance. Immediately to our left was the Wild Flower Meadow, planted in 1992, and currently carpeted, not by the ubiquitous Primrose, but the equally colourful, less common, Cowslip.

We continued east over Coxe's Cliff, with the wind in our face, past frisky bullocks to open downland, with imaginary views of Portland, before descending a narrow, slippery and in places, broken path to the secluded beach, which is Littlecombe Shoot. Sadly, a depository for a large volume of plastic detritus, brought in on winter tides.

The walk along the pebble strand began as an inevitable slog, but the low tide soon revealed a strip of shingle that raised spirits and feet alike. Past a block of terraced chalets, which at least were painted brown, to Branscombe Mouth and, joy of joys, a sign in the window of the "Sea Shanty" said "Open", signalling the prospect of a cup of tea to take away! Plenty of empty seats with commanding views, but this was a day to breathe in under a narrow overhang, with paper cup in cupped hands.

A chap at the back of a group going to Sidmouth wanted to know if there was "an easier way", avoiding Branscombe West Cliff. He was advised that there was only one way, which was the best way, and was wished good luck.

Once you reach the top of the climb, you are rewarded with level downland walking, and far reaching views of the protruding chalk and sandstone cliffs enjoying a peaceful paddle in a soft sea. Quite a contrast with the hard, black, foreboding granite cliffs pummelled by angry waves that some of us had witnessed along the Hartland Peninsular, the week before.

Onwards, past the remnants of the Iron Age ramparts of Berry Camp, the Romany Van, whose gate is now adorned by twentieth century, garish advertising memorabilia for "Green Shield Stamps". Go and have a look, but if you still have any, I think it's too late to cash them in. This time, through the inviting gate into the Cowslip meadow, making straight for a Trigonometry Point, painted white, and raised on a three foot platform, apparently adopted by a family, as a memorial to one of their number who enjoyed 18 happy years working for the Ordnance Survey.

Backs to the sea now, as we returned to our cars, near the remains of Weston Manor House, and the exciting prospect of all those household chores, we had turned our backs on this morning, but which, humbled, restored and recreated we will attack with relish on our return.

Chris Buckland
26th April 2016