

Tuesday 5 July 2016, Evening Summer Stroll with Chris Buckland

"IT DOESN'T GET BETTER THAN THIS!"

On the most beautiful (and the only one to date!) summer evening in early July, we gathered by the church in Newton Poppleford, on the occasion of our first Summer Evening Stroll in the Otter Valley.

Decision making centred on what to leave behind, rather than on what to carry or to wear. No need for a fleece, or extra layers, or waterproofs; you could probably have worn your old school plimsolls; such was the absence of loose stones, running water or mud. We were able to disregard our modern day obsession with 'taking on fluids', and leave (some) of our bottles behind, since our bodies would not be working hard enough, nor for long enough to need 'refuelling' on our two hour short saunter. However, we could not cast caution to the wind entirely, since there was none; instead the air was still, the sky was blue and the sun warm. East Devon had never looked so idyllic.

The usual fascination with bare knees and the ensuing conversation about the dangers of Ticks and Lyme disease enabled me to pass on my last information leaflet to a grateful (?) recipient. Actually, cavalier as it may sound, I'm probably more concerned about rampaging stinging nettles, but tonight I did not have to suffer alone!

Our comfortable four miles took us south alongside the Otter, north on Monkey Lane, and others less conspicuous, to Goosemoor, a cautious crossing of the A3052, then across a meadow (Ted says he saw a fox) and east to skirt Harpford Common. We entered the village by the back door and over the new bridge that "will never be washed away again", to confront the last of Newton Pop's once three pubs.

We had enjoyed the company of like minded individuals, the gentle exercise, in perfect surroundings and perfect conditions, and when all the elements of a good walk are compatible, contentment is the result. If that were not enough to invigorate our endorphins, we sat in the pub garden refreshing ourselves, while we put the world to rights, and darkness began to close in.

Chris Buckland
12 July 2016