

Wednesday, 26th July 2016, A Walk on Woodbury Common with Mike Paddison

"The Magnificent Seven, or was it Eight, still not sure"

On an idyllic morning for walking, twenty one people gathered at Woodbury Castle car park for the start of the annual eight commons walk.

The composition of the group was about half visitors to the area and half regular OVA walkers. It was obvious that the East Devon Heath Week organisers had again done a very good job advertising the events.

The walk leader's gave his H&S patter and in particular an plea to be careful when crossing the roads. The goal for the walk was to visit eight (seven known and one iffy one) of the thirteen commons that are in the vicinity of Woodbury Castle.

This was followed with an introduction by Kate Ponting on the purpose and scope of the Pebblebed Heath Week and the work of the Conservation Trust. Copies of A Walkers Guide, published by the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust, containing a description of six walks across the heaths were available at the beginning and the end of the walk.

The walk started with a short amble to a point in the middle of nowhere where a yellow ribbon had been thoughtfully placed to identify the point where three parish boundaries and their respective commons come together. An eagle-eyed walker spotted the yellow ribbon first and commented that the yellow had faded somewhat over the preceding year. Walkers walked around the bush and thus visited **Woodbury Common, Colaton Raleigh Common and Bicton Common** all in one fell swoop.

The next common was reached after walking alongside Uphams plantation and crossing the Four Firs/Yettington Road we entered an area containing a disused rifle range and other military paraphernalia. In the middle of this area we came across a concrete construction partially blocking a stream and associated pool. Eyebrows were raised when it was explained soldiers have to crawl through this tunnel full of water as part of their Marines training. Fortunately the entry and exit points were padlocked so no demonstrations were possible!

At Tucker's Plants, we crossed the road into **East Budleigh Common** where we stopped for mid-morning coffee in a sheltered copse adjoining Wheathill Plantation.



The post coffee group photo is shown below.



This was followed by a steady walk along Hayes Lane, where at its crest we stopped and enjoyed the views over East Budleigh, Otterton and beyond to Portland Bill.



We then turned south for a short walk onto **Shortwood Common** where we were able to see the effects of not managing a common. The rampant brambles and bracken were the results of letting nature do its thing.

The next stop was for lunch in an area adjoining the Buzzard Route (Budleigh to Exmouth Cycleway). There someone had thoughtfully erected several tarpaulin shelters and placed logs around a central area. We were able to stretch out for lunch.



After lunch we walked through **Dalditch Common**, across Inner Ting Tong and into Dalditch Plantation. Squabmoor Reservoir was clearly visible and it was pointed out that it no longer serves its original function and is now used exclusively for recreational purposes.

We exited the plantation onto a minor road and immediately climbed over a style/gate into **Withcombe Raleigh Common**, a little known area that is in the main managed by the RSPB (Aylesbear). This style/gate/path is not used very much and is overgrown. The walk leader had thoughtfully brought along a pair of secateurs which combined with another walker's substantial walking stick proved more than a match for the brambles and so the path into the common was cleared

Bystock Fishponds (originally 19thC reservoirs) managed by The Devon Wildlife Trust Bystock Nature Reserve was our next point of call.



Within the Reserve we took a different track, utilising extensive 'board walks', through 'The Valley' from the one taken in the previous year, but still merging onto Wrights Lane. From there we headed north onto **Lympstone Common** and proceeding in a northerly direction we clipped the edge of **Coombe Common** (not on the OS map) which is the eighth and last common.

From this point the walk proceeded northwards across Black Hill, alongside water filled quarry workings, and the gravel distribution plant, through a small fir tree plantation, and across Bicton Common and Woodbury Common to back to Woodbury Castle car park.

Many people stated they enjoyed the variety of terrain, flora and fauna. And for some it was a longest walk they had done for some considerable time, but they thought they had enjoyed it!

Many thanks to the Pebble Bed Heath Trust for facilitating this walk and to the OVA guys for putting this walk together.

"Backmarker"

10th August 2016