

Saturday 6 August 2016, East Budleigh and its Environs with Chris Buckland

"A LITTLE LOCAL WALK"

A highly expectant crowd turned up at the village of East Budleigh for the start of Stan's 5 mile walk to East Budleigh Common, on a gloriously sunny summer's day, only to have their hopes dashed by the news that their leader was unable to meet them. Surprisingly, and undaunted, the same number set off up Hayes Lane past the remains of the fallen cob cottage, now, finally, sporting signs of resurrection and a builder's board displaying the inspirational slogan: "buildsomethingbeautiful.com"! Not in need of any "tlc" is Vicar's Mead, just up the lane, with its thatched rooftop carvings, where Paul reminded us that local celebrity, Walt Raleigh had been educated.

Quickly off the road, we stepped into Lillaye Lane, where it felt as if we had strayed onto private land, so effectively had a collective called "Irresponsible Dog Owners Of East Budleigh" (IDOOEB), customised the ground over which we skipped and jumped to the accompanying shouts of "mess!", much like walkers shout "car!" to warn each other when confronted on a narrow lane.

Opting in favour of delayed gratification, we passed one path option to which we would return, and set off up the boring slog that is Hayeswood Lane. At the summit, I was chastised by Penny, whose description was far more poetic. "Like stepping through a tropical canyon of hanging creepers and lush ferns", she waxed. How could I have got it so wrong?

Hoping Stan would never find out, we left East Budleigh Common briefly, to put a toe on Shortwood Common, lingering en route to absorb our first magnificent view towards the sea and High Peak, before taking a lesser used fringe path to the south west through spruce, decorated beneath by prolific Rosebay Willowherb, more tall lush ferns, Ragwort, and the ubiquitous Himalayan Balsam. Mike has a less romantic view of this "mismanaged" stretch of common!

Down Shortwood Lane, skirting it's reliable four seasons puddle, (scene of Jim's cycling demise, some years before), then reassuringly back on East Budleigh common heading north west, through Holly woods, up a short climb towards our most northerly point, and a welcome coffee break in the sun.

One of the joys of walking on the Commons is to set a course and then be able to find a path that suits, rather than choose a path and have to go where it takes you! So we headed off to the north and east, slightly uphill

through more woods and a pine plantation with evidence of recent military inhabitancy, gathering to admire a silhouetted view of High Peak, Otterton Church and the Obelisk, down an enclosed stony path, emerging from this vegetative tunnel into a clearing of bright sunshine, with distant views to the sea and a vibrant palette of purple heather and yellow gorse. Photographers were busy. Next was the discovery of "Great Mullein". (Thank you Ervine and Margaret), an indigenous biennial producing a rosette of woolly leaves in the first year and a tall yellow flowering stem the following year, which greeted us, then the plant dies. So hurry up or the chance will be gone.

A little 'big dipper' on dry, sandy paths, past a huge stack of logs used as the backdrop for the commemorative photograph of the "Magnificent 7", downhill to skirt Hayes "Keep Out" Wood, and up a short rise to witness one of the most breath taking views, we enjoy locally. Looking over East Budleigh and the village of Otterton, the Obelisk, High Peak, Peak Hill and Mutters Moor, beyond to Beer Head, the Dorset Coast, and Portland Bill. Or was it? Has it moved? Could we really see it through the mist or were we seeing a familiar 'picture' we carry in our heads? Well, one person is convinced she saw it. She probably saw the Loch Ness monster too.

Gently downhill to Wynard's Farm and through the village, where, I think it's fair to say a very contented group of OVA walkers said their goodbyes, while some continued their bonhomie at the Sir Walter Raleigh.

Chris Buckland
8 August 2016