

## Wednesday 5th October 2016, Devon Coast to Coast - Stage XI with Chris Buckland and Mike Paddison

### *"Stage XI, Tarr Steps to Simonsbath"*

It was not a very auspicious start to this penultimate stage of the Devon Coast to Coast walk with extensive road works in Newton Poppleford causing varying delays for everybody. However the transport arrangements were quickly sorted and we set out for Simonsbath by a variety of routes.

We all arrived at Simonsbath in the allotted timescales with tales of adventures along the route, only to find the long awaited toilet facilities out of order due to 'water supply' problems. Fortunately we were assured that equivalent facilities were available at Tarr Steps. All thirteen walkers piled into three cars and set off for the next stage of our adventure.

After taking the appropriate comfort measures, we took note of the nearby pub/inn opening hours and set off on a short walk to Tarr Steps, the beginning of Stage XI.

Tarr Steps is a wonderful bridge structure comprising 17 spans of clapper stones across the River Barle. It has stood the test of many floods even if some parts of it get swept away by the most ferocious river torrents. We were told that the bridge can now be more easily rebuilt, once all the pieces are found, because all the elements in the bridge are now numbered and identified on an appropriate drawing and thus make re-assembly much easier.

After taking many photos, we set off walking along side the river. It was very pleasant; the weather was very good and dappled sunlight filtered through the trees onto the water - all very atmospheric.



At the beginning of Lear Wood, as the valley sides became steeper, the path became more narrow, wet and rocky and so we had to gradually climb up away from the river, but fortunately it was always in sight.

After Pit Wood, we all heard a curious mechanical “clacking” sound and we deviated from the path towards the sound. One of the “hydraulically knowledgeable” walkers said it was a ‘hydraulic ram’. Many of us had seen the term on OS maps, but few had seen or heard a working one. There was not much to see, because the apparatus was contained in a small ramshackle building. Wikipedia contains a useful description of their purpose, construction and historical development.

We continued across a large meadow and at its end the path climbed alongside a stand of gorse, into the edge of Oakbeer Wood joining another path high up overlooking the river below. The path descended and took us through riverside meadows, pass fords and stepping stones to eventually reach a bridle path to Withypool Common. About this time houses on the edge of Withypool came into view with Exmoor clearly visible in the distance.



The bridle path finished at a lane which led to downhill, past the village pub to the village ‘square’ containing a shop cum post office, seasonal café and toilets.



After stops at the shop and the café, we continued a little further along the road, crossed the river and settled down for some lunch on benches on a grassy bank that is a popular summer picnic spot. Although the river looked very inviting, nobody ventured into the water for a paddle!

After lunch, we retraced our steps for a hundred metres or so, cut uphill by the old Withypool School, crossing several fields to reach Kitridge Lane where we turned to the northwest and continued up the lane for several kilometers until we reached the edge of the Exmoor moorland. After some careful navigating across multiple paths we reached a section of the Two Moors Way that many of us had walked before, most recently on Peter Paine's walk 'Exmoor and the Scenic Barle Valley' on the 1<sup>st</sup> June this year.



There was much excitement as walkers vied to be the first to spot the iconic Landacre Bridge.



Duly spotted and photographed we continued along the edge of a 'woodland' on the OS map, but in actuality the woodland was pretty much stripped bare by logging operations. After walking around Cow Castle Settlement we stopped for afternoon tea on a grassy knoll by a bend in the River Barle.



The sun shone, the weather was warm, the water bubbled gently over the stones on the riverbed and the walkers were relaxed. All was well with the world until marching orders were given - a most idyllic, but short interlude.

The remainder of the walk continued along the Barle Valley until reaching woodlands and fields on the outskirts of Simonsbath. A short walk through these familiar woods brought us to the main road and a short walk to the car park.

The final part of the walk was to pile into the cars parked in Simonsbath and drive to Tarr Steps where the cars we left in the morning would hopefully still be there. Some walkers left promptly, other adjourned to the Tarr Farm Inn for refreshments. A pleasant time was spent sitting in the sun discussing the many highlights of the days walk. Then the sun went down behind the hills, the temperature dropped many degrees and the warmth of our cars beckoned.

A splendid day out left us looking forward to the final stage of the Devon Coast to Coast.

***Mike Paddison***  
***16<sup>th</sup> October 2016***

A **hydraulic ram**, or **hydram**, is a **cyclic water pump** powered by **hydropower**. It takes in water at one "**hydraulic head**" (pressure) and flow rate, and outputs water at a higher hydraulic head and lower flow rate. The device uses the **water hammer** effect to develop pressure that allows a portion of the input water that powers the **pump** to be lifted to a point higher than where the water originally started. The hydraulic ram is sometimes used in remote areas, where there is both a source of **low-head hydropower** and a need for pumping water to a destination higher in elevation than the source. In this situation, the ram is often useful, since it requires no outside source of **power** other than the **kinetic energy** of flowing water.