

Wednesday, 16th November 2016, Hawkerland with Chris Buckland

"A Unruly Mob?"

Never have we seen the Otter Inn car park so near to over-flowing! Was it the exceptional Autumn sunshine, the promised pub lunch or the reputation of the charismatic walk leader which was pulling in the crowds? No, there was another event monopolizing the car park and the "charismatic walk leader" was substituted for by CB at the last minute!

Gradually, a group of 22 walkers + 2 dogs assembled for the 6-mile jaunt and we promptly set off to reach the village centre, only to be halted and lectured on the need to walk together rather than as a cross-country relay team. It seemed excessive to corral the group with mounted police, but it transpired that the horse rider was merely impersonating an officer of the law with a band of checkered tape on her helmet and a yellow fluorescent jacket with the word "POLITE" (referring to giving horses due consideration) emblazoned on the back.

So, very much chastened, we set off in orderly fashion up to Yonder Hill with views of typical rolling Devon countryside and discussions on the merits of the new dairy farm highway. Stunning views across to High Peak and then we were intrigued by a miniature sewage plant with a gravity fed sprinkler system which was reminiscent of the water wheels that once operated in the area. The site of the Old Dotton Mill (once the subject of a Time Team investigation) was currently occupied by an Environment Agency cabin whose staff were busy calibrating equipment to place in the river to give forewarnings of possible flood dangers downstream at Budleigh and its environs.

At Goosemoor, despite, earlier tough talking, the Leader was easily persuaded into an unscheduled coffee stop in a most unlikely place in front of a row of cottages. Ominously, he then fashioned himself a larger than usual stout walking stick and urged us on to ascend the Hawkerland Valley, joining the East Devon Way and Chris' own favourite footpath in all Devon! It was certainly worthy of this accolade with woodland in full autumn colours to our right and open countryside falling away to our left. Suggestions that the frequent referrals to the map by our Leader were indications that, until that stage, we had been hopelessly lost were met with mild disdain! So we then progressed to more familiar surroundings at Kingston Farm, crossed a ford for a quick boot clean and dropped down to the busy B378 for the precarious crossing into the safety of the Otter Inn.

A walk, memorable for very mild conditions (13°C), with lots of sunshine and autumn colours which were as good as I can remember, Oh, and a Leader who enlivened the outing with entertaining asides and a school masterly demeanor that almost, but not quite kept control!

David Hatch

18 November 2016