

Reflections on The Two Rivers Walk, Saturday 4th February 2017

It was with some trepidation that the Walk Leader approached this OVA walk. The recon walk the previous Saturday had gone well. Although the ground was wet and frozen in places and there were only a few muddy places and no significant flooding. The sun shone through out the recon walk which was completed in the scheduled time arriving at The Beer Engine on time for a well earned lunch.

Being mindful that the walk takes place alongside the Exe and the Creedy rivers the Walk Leader maintained a careful watch on the rivers levels which appeared to go significantly up and down throughout the week and by the end of the week the peak reading were exceeding the norm above which flooding could occur. Flood warnings and alerts appeared and disappeared from the various government information web sites. Luckily, by Saturday morning the river levels were below their peaks and the walk was on, but by this time the Walk Leader's nerves were in shatters.

Nine adventurous walkers met at the Exeter Bus station and boarded the bus to Stoke Cannon. As the bus proceeded north from Cowley Bridge the exclamations from the walkers became quite audible as the scene unfolded before us. To the right was Stoke Woods, to the left was almost wall to wall flood water as far as the eye could see. The floodplains were doing their job of protecting Exeter from the peak river flows!

We soon arrived in Stoke Canon and met another two walkers and their well-behaved dog. The Walk Leader explained that the first part of the walk to Brampford Speke and the crossing of the Exe was crucial. There was no Plan B or C if the group could not cross the Exe. Some in the group murmured that the Walk Leader worried too much.

The walk to Brampford Speke along the Devonshire Heartland Way/Exe Valley Way was uneventful. The Exe river was flowing fast, but the meadows were not flooded except for one low area where many migratory birds had gathered to rest and feed. A lonely great white egret was impressive in flight as it settled down by the river. After a short period, whilst the aspiring photographers snapped away, we continued along the path until the water meadow alongside the bridge crossing the Exe. This was not a problem because some enterprising group had built a raised walkway over the wet bits and so we crossed the Exe bridge into Brampton Speke, on time, with relatively dry feet and in good

humour.



By popular request we walked through the village before leaving the Exe Valley Way, turning in a westerly direction along the Devonshire Heartland Way to Upton Pyne. After crossing a field with a "Bull in Field" notice, but thankfully no bull, we came upon an enclosure with four or more alpacas. By this time the sun was shining and drying out their thick coats. The condensation rising from their



coats gave each of them their own little cloud of fog in the still cold air. Pause for more photos.

We crossed wet fields on raised walkways, and down muddy tracks. The Walk Leader observed that there was more lying water than on the previous Saturday, but the mud wasn't significantly worse as we dropped down into Upton Pyne. By this time the weather was warm and conversation well established to the degree that the leader missed the next turning. After an unnecessary three hundred metre diversion, we walked through Glebe House farm to a recently planted field which had the potential to be very muddy. The



decision was made to keep to the public path and we crossed the field without a problem to our coffee stop at a big dry barn adjoining Bidwell Lane.

At the village of Langford, we continued in a westerly direction towards the railway line and the Creedy. In the way was a recently ploughed and tilled field. The soil was clayey, fine and very wet with the Jackmoor Brook running directly across it. After some discussion about walking around the edge, the Walk Leader was persuaded to 'stick to the path'; stick being the operative word. He set off confidently with the soles of his boots increasing in thickness with every step until he met the brook blocking his path. He searched for solid ground to step on as he crossed the water. A carefully measured leap to the solid looking 'island' in the middle of the brook was not uneventful as the ground gave way and the mud was halfway up his gaiters. A quick scrabble to the other side of the brook found firmer mud. The other walkers quickly abandoned the notion of

'sticking to the path' and found dryer and more solid routes across the field. However we all ended up with seriously muddy boots. We trooped across the railway line leaving a trail of mud. Some wag commented that the Barnstaple trains would now be late because of 'mud on the line'.



We continued through several small fields which showed evidence of recent flooding until we met up with the track that led us along side the Creedy which was in full spate. The walk along the Creedy was uneventful apart from the necessary detours to avoid sections of flooded pathway. Eventually we reached the road and a further short walk brought us to the water tap behind The Beer Engine.



Our boots were still quite muddy and this was an opportunity to clean them

before going into the pub. The antics, under the water jet from the tap, to clean the boots whilst still wearing them seemed to entertain passers-by. Some walkers in their enthusiasm for clean boots, ended up much wetter than others!

After the water antics, we all adjourned to The Beer Engine for well-earned refreshment and some good pub food. Finally after a short walk back to the main road we caught the bus back to Exeter. Another great OVA walk.

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