

Saturday 18th February 2017, Dr Blackall's Walk with Rosemary and David Hatch

"Who was Dr Blackall"

We set off early on a foggy morning to get to the starting point of the walk, several miles west of Ashburton, at New Bridge car park, beside the magnificent River Dart. Luckily the fog cleared once we had escaped the Otter Valley, and the day improved so much that by lunch time we were basking in warm sunshine. 14 curious walkers gathered to find out who Dr Blackall was, and were entertained in the car park watching the large congregation of kayakers and their crafts getting ready to challenge the rapids on the River Dart.

Rosemary and David Hatch, the walk leaders, took us up hill, heading for Mel Tor via Hannaford. We soon got to Dr Blackall's Drive, where Rosemary explained that he had been an eminent doctor from Exeter, who loved Dartmoor so much that he moved to nearby Spitchwick Manor, and had this carriage driveway constructed in the 1880s so that he could drive out to view the wonderful scenery. And indeed there was a superb view of the Dart Valley and distant tors. We stopped for a coffee break at Mel Tor and Rosemary provided the group with delicious lemon drizzle cakes, as well as a fantastic viewpoint.

We then headed towards Bel Tor, on the Two Moors Way, and down to Ponsworthy Ford, where we followed the road down to Leusdon Church, and a peaceful lunch stop. The churchyard was delightful, with views across the Wedderburn Valley to distant Buckland Beacon, as well as carpets of snowdrops and comfortable benches for weary walkers. We discovered the last resting place of Dr Thomas Blackall, MD, FRCP, as he had an imposing tombstone near the church.

Feeling well rested, we continued with the walk, crossing fields close to Spitchwick Manor, heading down to the road and the River Dart again. It was a delightful stroll beside the river, spotting early Brimstones butterflies and colourful kayakers, and so back to the car park.

The group then adjourned to the nearby Tavistock Inn at Poundsgate, lured by the promise of cream teas. However, there was great disappointment when it was discovered that we had come too early, as the clotted cream delivery had not yet arrived. After much confusion, and the drinking of cups of tea, and a few pints of ale, the cream and home-made warm scones suddenly appeared, and were well worth waiting for. Thanks to Rosemary and David for showing us this lovely part of Dartmoor, and for organising such a delightful day out.

Dee Woods

19 February 2107