

Monday 6th March 2017, Walk with Penny & Paul Kurowski

“OVA Railway Walk to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the closing of the Budleigh Salterton Branch Line”

45 of us assembled at Newton Poppleford to start the walk - mostly OVA members and friends, plus half a dozen “Railway Ramblers” some hailing from as far away as Cardiff! This was a rarely available opportunity to walk the course of the railway on which the last passenger train ran 50 years ago. Kate Ponting from Clinton Devon Estates had arranged for us to walk the sections that ran through private estate land, and, together with walk leader Paul Kurowski, led us along these sections.

Paul and Newton Poppleford resident Haylor Lass showed us old photographs so that we could make out where the old station had stood, with its accompanying goods yard, and imagine the road bridge over the railway, and even the camping carriages in a nearby siding.

We soon set off, crossing our first hurdle, the A3052, with the help of Chris Buckland and Mike Paddison, sensibly wearing fluorescent jackets. Then it was a flat level walk to Otterton along the line of the railtrack, giving us a new perspective on the beautiful Otter Valley, and allowing the railway enthusiasts to inspect remaining pieces of railway architecture, some dating from 1895.

Kate explained how the route was now used for movement of farm vehicles and cattle - indeed we had to use it in the morning before cows were moved along it later for milking.



As we neared Otterton, we saw the obvious signs of beaver activity - flooded fields belonging to Bicton College. Kate explained that beavers had dammed one of the streams, causing the flooding. Mitigation measures were now in place to discourage further damn building, whilst allowing the beavers to flourish. [photo of Kate explaining to the group]

We arrived at the old East Budleigh Station as Otterton Church clock chimed 12.

The station building is now the home of John and Margaret Edmonds, and John had kindly opened up the gate to allow us to walk under the road bridge and into his garden where we could eat our picnics on the station platform (a welcome shelter from the squally showers). We felt like excited children as we took up his offer of rides round the garden on "The Otterton and East Budleigh Light Railway"! A collection for his charity, Millwater School, raised over £54. The Old Station is opening to the public on 1st July, 2-5pm, again raising money for Millwater School.



There will be cream teas, free rides pulled by his steam train, and a display of miniature traction engines - a treat not to be missed. [photos of the group on the platform, and on the train]

Well refreshed, 43 of us walked on along the now rather muddy track to Budleigh Salterton. At one point the slurry was ankle deep and Kate led a party of "slurry dodgers" on a detour round the fields. The hardy enthusiasts, keen to keep to the line of the railway where possible, picked the best route through the slurry, and Penny demonstrated how a walking pole can be usefully employed as a depth gauge.

Once at Budleigh we met the end of the track, as it reached the site of Budleigh Salterton Station at the junction of Leas Road and Upper Stoneborough Lane. At one time there had been Normans cash and carry supermarket built on the station site, but this has now been replaced by modern housing. We wound our way through the town to the Fairlynch Museum which had been opened especially for us. Museum Chair Trevor Waddington and a team of volunteers showed us their exhibits about the railway, and many of us watched a video which

showed the railway in operation and how it had now changed. Thanks to the museum for providing the much appreciated tea and biscuits. Many walkers left at this point, but a hardy 18 set off on the last stretch to Exmouth. For the first section we had to use our imagination (and Paul's old maps), as housing in Budleigh now obliterates the railway line, and the cutting to the east of Bear Lane appears to have been filled in.



However we were soon "back on track" on the cycle path to Exmouth. By the time we reached Littleham more walkers had left us to catch buses, leaving a band of 13 to be led into Phear Park along the almost-finished cycle track by Peter from GAP Group Contractors.

Our now weary group walked out of Phear Park, inspecting the route of the long-gone viaduct, marked now by the modern infill housing; again Paul's photographs and maps helped our imaginations. The final stretch was along the daffodil strewn embankment alongside the main road; where cars now roar along there were once 4 lines of railway.



We crossed to Exmouth station and yes, we'd made it! A quick check of GPS devices and Fitbits concluded that we'd walked 12.5 - 13 miles; the detour to the museum in Budleigh had added extra miles to the 10.25 mile route of the railway.

After the obligatory photograph (thanks to the teenager who volunteered himself to take it), we dispersed to our homes, buses, and for 6 of us, the pub whilst we awaited the 157.

If you want to read and see more about the history of the railway, here is the list of resources Paul used when preparing for the walk:

The Budleigh Salterton Railway 1897-1967 - Fairlynch Museum

Branch Lines to Exmouth - Vic Mitchell and Keith Smith - Middleton Press - ISBN 1-873793-00-6

British Railways Past and Present East Devon - David Mitchell - Past and Present Publishing Ltd - ISBN 978-1-85895-211-6

LSWR West Country Lines Then and Now - Mac Hawkins - David and Charles - ISBN 0-7153-0122-5

The Book of Budleigh Salterton From Salt to Watering-Place - D. Richard Cann - Halsgrove - ISBN 1-844114-406-1

DVD Memories of the Sidmouth and Budleigh Salterton Branches In association with Ian Pringle - Branch Line Video 2007

Penny Kurowski
8 March 2017