

Saturday 14 October 2017 –“More Exmoor” with Vivien Insull

Six of us set off, led by our intrepid leader, Vivien Insull, on a warm but cloudy October morning. The car park was full of youngsters setting off on their Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award, all geared up to spend a night on the Moor. We, thankfully, were merely geared up for a picnic on the Moor.

Having passed a delightful field full of a varied collection of very free range hens (which necessitated a post-walk visit for some to buy eggs), we headed down a combe, crossed a ford by the aptly named Ford Farm and started our ascent to open Moor. As we headed up the hill, we spotted six red deer running along the horizon. We then saw a couple of quad bikes and a few horse riders and heard hounds in North Hawkwell Wood and a furiously blowing horn.

We did not linger to see the outcome of this, but continued up the hill through a suckling herd with a very large bull contentedly chewing the cud a few yards off the path. We entered the open Moor and joined the Coleridge Way down to Hanny Combe. As we walked on the path above Spangate Grove, we spied below us a magnificent red deer stag keeping a beady eye on us as we passed above him.



We crossed the stream at Hanny Comb and began the long, but relatively gentle, ascent to Dunkery Beacon (1,705 feet above sea level). Such was the ascent that we were obliged to stop for lunch halfway up. The views from the Beacon were superb, even though the visibility was compromised by somewhat hazy conditions. Nevertheless, we could see clearly the Welsh coast, and down the coast to Hinckley Point, the islands in the Bristol Channel and, the other way, the brooding bulk of Dartmoor.



Having feasted our eyes from the Beacon, we descended towards Dunkery Gate. On reaching the Gate, we passed through a motley selection of four wheel drive vehicles and quad bikes and were planning to pause by a stream. However, we were told that where we were planning to stop was the collecting point for a number of Exmoor ponies being collected on the Moor and that it might be wise to change our plans. This we did with alacrity and positioned ourselves on the far side of a gate. We waited for a while to see the ponies, which were evidently not in too much of a hurry to be collected.

We moved on down into the valley of the River Avil along a beautiful path on the edge of the valley by a long, magnificent row of ancient beeches. The colours in the valley were glorious, but would have been better with some sunshine! A final, if somewhat muddy pull from the river up to Wheddon Cross completed an excellent day's walking and the opportunity for those in need of refreshment to visit the "Rest and be Thankful" – in the circumstances, a highly appropriate name for a pub!

David & Rosie Conner