

Wednesday 15th November Hawkerland before lunch with Chris Buckland

As early arrivals gathered to undertake a six mile walk in quintessentially Otter Valley terrain, just one driver took advantage of the hard standing provided by the Otter Inn car park, to keep his interior mats free from the detritus on which the remainder of the group parked! We set off under a cloudy sky but it was dry and unseasonably mild, with the occasional hint of a watery sun trying to establish itself.

We'd not long left the village of Collaton Raleigh before we were distracted by what appeared to be the 'murmuring' behaviour of a flock of birds, but these were not starlings, and determining their identity occupied a number of the group for several minutes. "Linnets"? "Finches"? Even Stella's exquisite image of one of the flock silhouetted against the cloudy sky, was inconclusive.

Approaching Dotton we enjoyed our first view of High Peak, proud in the distance, while the Otter meandered its way north towards Newton Poppleford from the valley beneath. Onwards, past the Environment Agency's river monitoring site and the frustratingly inaccessible zip-wire left tantalisingly suspended across the river. Surely, a 'visitor attraction' in waiting? A nod to the site of the alleged mill at Dotton, before a short diversion to admire the very well presented example of a Mark Rolle Farmstead. If you have attended one of Brian Turnball's informative walks that visits some of Rolle's prolific legacy of farms and cottages in East Devon, or read the excellent book on this 19th century benefactor's local history, produced by the OVA (*See the back cover of your Newsletter*), you will be familiar with the superficial characteristics of his work: corbels, rounded corners to the walls, intricate and decorative brick-work around windows, and his customary moniker on the face of the building, lest its residents should forget their allegiance to "MR 1871" .

Monkey Lane produced two memorable images on opposite sides: to the north we were surprised (in mid-November!) and delighted, to see a field prolific with red poppies. What's more, just four days after Remembrance Sunday, these poppies were not paper or plastic, or part of an art instillation, but the real thing.



A 180' turn took our gaze up to the summit of High Peak, whose brooding and inspiring presence seemed to track our every move. Lanes and tracks through Buzzard country, one of whom duly glided by, to the tiny hamlet of Goosemore; so remote, yet only a short hop to the noisy A3502.

Now the only real 'climb' of the day; a short sprint onto Hawkerland Common, with magnificent views of the coastline and a break for sustenance and recuperation AND an opportunity for Professor David (the other one!) to explain the existence of the "scrapes" that were apparent on this south facing heath land.; small areas of approximately 10 yards square, on which the top soil had been 'scraped' away, in an attempt by the Devon Wildlife Trust to replicate the conditions that will encourage the "Siver Studded Blue Butterfly to breed. This was so interesting that for a moment I nearly forgot that David had failed to produce any cake, thus breaking a tradition established by wife Rosemary, way back in 2016.



Having shown due deference to the East Devon Way, we dallied to admire and engage with one of the men building a new dwelling alongside the very well presented, "Morrish Cotley". Here was a new build in total sympathy with its surroundings: oak beams, a curved cob wall whose curvature was mirrored by its slate roof. One of our group said she just had to have a roof like that one, and added the builder to her Christmas card list. A personal favourite; a wooded path, full of colour, floating leaves and plenty to kick under foot, took us around the boundary of Colaton Raleigh Common, with views across adjoining fields to the coast and, yes of course, High Peak again.

The last mile was over the Kingston cross-roads, down to the ford and a boot washing exercise, before reapplying the mud once more on our last climb to Back Lane and a gentle descent to the Otter Inn and lunch, where some expressed the view to a rather peeved member of staff that we could not see any difference in the décor since their most recent reincarnation under "new Management". I also lamented the demise of the "Bacon, Brie, and Cranberry sauce baguette", but had to admit that the "Parsnip and Celleriac soup" was delicious!

Chris Buckland