

Wednesday, 3 February 2016 C2C with Chris and Mike

THE DEVON COAST TO COAST

Stage 1 Wembury to Yealmpton

We couldn't wait to get started! After all we had 117 miles to go! The A38 seemed to go on and on, before dumping us at the mercy of Plymouth's urban sprawl and its ubiquitous road works. Suddenly, however, the veil was lifted: the sky was blue, the sea was blue, the bay was a perfect semi-circle, and a half a mile off shore was the Great Mew Stone, brooding like some rocky iceberg. There below us was Wembury Beach and the start of our adventure.

While our Drivers sacrificed their coffee to take the cars to the end of the walk, (thanks 'chaps', others to take a turn next time), the rest of us indulged ourselves in the chilly, wintery sunshine, under the superior gaze of St. Werburgh Church, whose 15 Century tower has been a 'daymark' for sailors for centuries. Fortunately for Penny, she produced her belated birthday offering of her home made flap jack; delicious! You are forgiven Penny, but rest assured we will remember next year.



Our Drivers returned, and photographs were taken before we set off confidently on our way. Mike strode off, determined to hit the 2.7 mph that would be required to complete the East Devon Way in 24 hours; a project for a summer's day to look

forward to! We knew it was good for us so we chased after him. Fortunately, Paula was on hand to rein him in, and on the rare occasions when Mike pretended he was uncertain, on this largely well signed route, Vivien, with map in hand was able to show him the way. The South Hams is not unlike East Devon; largely agricultural, with rolling fields and steep valleys.....and lots of mud! No matter if, like Jane and Sue you have new gaiters to show off, especially if they appear to repel mud.

Travelling South to North meant that the only way to see that inspirational view of the sea was to keep turning round or walk backwards. Gradually, we reset our mental compass, to enjoy our surroundings, like the masses of Snowdrops that Paula pointed out for me, or the bank that contained every wild spring flower imaginable to test Penny's identification skills, or the post card picture of the ford crossing of the Cofflete Creek, a tributary of the River Yealm.

"And on Wood" was the site for coffee and an official welcome to new member John, although we spared him the usual initiation ceremony. Rucksacks were hung on branches, flasks produced and Penny offered our Drivers the chance to catch up the lucky ones who had already dined on flap jack. Chris was shouted at for using his size 11s in an attempt to wantonly destroy fledgling daffodils struggling to find enough daylight in this leaf carpeted glade. Down on all fours he managed to caress nature back to life, or was he practising a much needed cat stretch to flex his back?

Onwards, and two and a half hours after leaving Wembury, we settled down under the trees in a small park next to the parish church of St Mary at Brixton, where, outside its gate is a beautifully restored Victorian lamppost, honouring Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee in 1897. Towards the end of a pleasant picnic lunch, Chris was, not for the first time, victimised. Peter deliberately allowed his plastic bag to blow across the park, knowing full well, that being a descent fellow, Chris would attempt to retrieve it. Sure enough, he jumped up, inadvertently stamped on more daffodils, was again shouted at, before attaining the now all too familiar pose to get close to nature and restore the damage. (But he did get the bag.)

Refuelled, we had barely a mile and a half to the finish of this 7.5 mile stage, a distance our resident nerds would dispute at the end, when Graham and Mike reported that the satellites, on which their GPS technology relies, indicated less than seven miles; the first time that an OVA walk had failed to deliver its promise. No time to be complacent, however, as there was a 'sting in the tail' of this walk, as we ascended a short, sharp hill of about 70 metres and a 1 in 4 gradient. Our efforts were rewarded with tantalising views of the Dartmoor that waits for us.

So to Yealpton and the Manor Street Café, where we arrived at 2.58pm, just as it was about to close, but were made very welcome by its cheerful owner, who made light of the mess our muddy boots made on her floor. Andrew had his special request for "builders tea" met and the rest of us had the same but called ours "tea". After a partial revival, conversation turned to the walk and Penny's astonishing

assertion that "it was better than I anticipated". I suppose we should be grateful. Though no more astonishing than the fact that Peter bought tea for his best friends. Having briefly ingratiated herself with her flap jack, Penny and her accomplice Paul, displayed complete contempt for the Group, by ordering a slice of cake, producing 'his' and 'hers' forks and gorging themselves in front of a hungry crowd. Just time for an excited conversation between the men, encouraged by Viv, about belly dancing, although none of the women accepted our invitation to mount the tables and demonstrate.

The drivers returned and we journeyed back to East Devon with heightened anticipation for the next stage; only 110 miles to go!

Chris Buckland
4th February 2016