

1st June 2016 Exmoor and the Scenic Barle Valley with Peter Paine

"A Figure of Eight Around Simonsbath"

On this warm but cloudy day seven keen walkers assembled in Simonsbath for a walk on Exmoor and the Barle Valley. Midges were swarming around our heads as Peter generously supplied us with insect repellent and then we were off.



Climbing through the woodland of the Exmoor forest we emerged at the top of open land with views of the nearby hills. Here our numbers were swelled by a couple from Chichester and their dog who were contemplating which way to go next. They decided to join us as we were heading back to Simonsbath on the northern leg of the figure of eight walk. Luckily for us they also stopped while we had our coffee break, for as we set off, we became aware of a large group of deer in the distance. We were heading towards them and we watched as they ran in a group of about 100 first in one direction and then in the next. As we got closer they decided to run down a very steep edge of the hill, only to stop halfway down and turn around climbing back up the hill and then running back past us, off in the opposite direction. We all congratulated Peter on organising such a spectacle and happily continued on our way downhill.



Many of us recognised parts of this route from a previous walk last year when walking to the source of the River Exe.

It was then a walk through areas of woodland and open fields to return back to Simonsbath where we stopped for lunch close to the River Barle. It was at this moment that the rain decided to make an appearance so we headed for the shelter of a large nearby tree and ate our lunch while house martins flew around us.

Refreshed we headed off through another green woodland and climbed back out into the moorland with its green rolling hills surrounding us. Eventually we came upon a group of cattle and their calves in our path, including some highland cattle with magnificent looking horns. They duly moved out of our way and we continued climbing up the green hills that eventually gave way to heathland. When we reached the Two Moors Way footpath we headed back along this, descending rapidly down towards the River Barle valley. Here we caught views of Landacre Bridge, a scheduled ancient monument with five arches.



On our way down to the river's edge we walked through an area of woodland where many trees had been uprooted and then stopped as an unusual bird had been spotted. It was



later identified as a Redstart. We continued around the base of Cow Castle an Iron Age Hillfort to the edge of the River Barle where we stopped for a short break. Tadpoles were spotted in the river and two members considered the possibility of relocating a few of them to their garden pools. Fortunately for the tadpoles they remained in the clear waters of the river as the rest of the group headed for home back along the river's edge to Simonsbath.

Once back by the cars we decided to enjoy a well earned drink at the attractive Exmoor White Horse Inn.

Many thanks to Peter Paine for organising such an entertaining and interesting walk around Exmoor.

Stella French

28 June 2016