

Friday 12th August 2016, Devon Coast to Coast, Stage IX

Witheridge to Knowstone

We were in the quiet heartland of Devon heading towards Exmoor on this fairly cloudy but warm summers day. Only four of our group were available today to complete Stage 9 of Devons Coast to Coast route (Two Moors Way). We started from the small village of Witheridge and headed down towards a tributary of the Little Dart River passing through tall fields of corn and areas of woodland. Travelling across large fields and over boggy ground via boardwalks we came to Bradford Moor where various wild flowers including Marsh and Early Purple Orchids are said to flower in early summer. None were evident today but it was a bit late in the year really.



We passed through a novel gate comprising a large iron wheel bearing the inscription Barclay Ross and Hutchinson of Aberdeen. It had travelled a long way to find this resting place.

Shortly after this we crossed over the Little Dart River at Bradford Bridge just past Bradford Mill. Walking up the quiet lanes we caught distant views of Dartmoor to the south

and a short while later the slopes of Exmoor ahead, all the while approaching a large cluster of wind turbines.

At one point we stopped to spend some time watching the turbine blades and decided that one of them wasn't moving, only to realise later that it was a trick of the light.



At the end of the lane we came upon the Old Toll House on what was the main turnpike (i.e. toll road) in the 18th Century, the house had been modernised but still appears to maintain its character. From here we wandered through a very wide darkly shaded green lane bounded tightly on both sides by large beech trees, speculating about its origin, as the pathway seemed so grand and there were only fields around us. We stopped midway to have lunch in an adjacent field and eventually emerged from the lane via a ladderstile at the edge of Knowstone Outer Moor.

In my mind the next area was the most interesting part of today's walk. The Knowstone Moors (Outer and Inner) and the nearby Hares Down together form Devon's largest remaining block of rare culm grassland.



This once covered much of North Devon. It was said in the guidance book that this type of grassland has an extraordinary ability to absorb water, five times the rate of ordinary grassland. I

I can confirm just how wet it was as I knelt on one knee to take a photo of the Cotton grass growing here and realised on standing up that I had a very wet patch on my trouser knee. Normally you are aware just how wet the ground is, as your feet sink into it and you can see the presence of water but not so, on this rough grassy and mossy ground.

The route across Knowstone Moor passed under the noisy A361 which was rather a shock having not encountered any other walkers on our route and suddenly meeting such a

busy road. We quickly headed on towards the wind turbines and then came upon a stone circle with a block of granite in the centre.

The granite block was placed in celebration of the Millennium in Knowstone Parish. Some of us were intrigued by the writing inscribed on this block which had Dartmoor carved on one end and Exmoor the other and the wording around the other sides saying something like 'Celebrating 2000 years of Christianity'.



It was then only a short walk down the hill towards the small village of Knowstone with its 13th Century Church and thatched pub - The Masons Arms.



The pub has a 1 star Michelin rating, but was just closing so any dreams of cream teas were dashed. We were however bought ice-creams, thank you Heather, when we returned to Witheridge to pick up the other car.

Many thanks to Chris Buckland for organising and leading the walk.

Stella French
18 August 2016