

**Saturday 25th February 2017, Culm Valley and Culmstock with Iain Ure**

***"A Monument to Wellington"***

All OVA members may be familiar with a distant view of an impressive monument as they travel the M5 near Wellington. However, 8 intrepid walkers decided to have a closer look at the tallest obelisk in the world.



Sharing cars we met at the National Trust car park on the ridge on a cool and breezy morning, but soon warmed up as we set off southwards along a ridge with fine views towards Culm Davey Hill and the Culm Valley. After a short time we joined a lane and headed down to Culm Pyne Barton, a fine old farmstead, mentioned in the Doomsday Book, but now with a more modern farmhouse dating from 1860, and a large commercial orchard nearby. We carried on along this quiet lane, stopping briefly for coffee and parkin, before joining a very pleasant riverside path taking us into Culmstock.



We paused to admire the medieval church of All Saints, which strangely had a yew tree growing out the top of the tower. The tree is said to date from 1750, and during the drought of 1976 a villager climbed the tower to water it. We walked through the village to the Riverside Inn where we stopped for lunch. As well as serving a fine pint, the 'specials' menu was indeed very special, and the recommended Portuguese fish stew was enjoyed by half the group.

Suitably fortified the group set off northwards climbing steadily up the hill towards Culmstock Beacon on Black Down Common. This was one of the Armada early warning beacons of 1588, and was built of stone in a beehive shape to provide shelter for the watchers whilst on duty.



As you would expect, there were views to distant hills, somewhat spoilt by the misty conditions. It is Grade II listed, and was rebuilt in 1870 after it collapsed. We crossed the common, and again the views to the north opened up over the Tone Valley and beyond. Gradually we were getting closer to our goal, and glimpses of the monument came into view through the trees. As we got nearer, it was disappointing to see heras fencing surrounding this very impressive structure, which somewhat detracted from its impact. The foundations were laid in 1817, but it took 75 years to complete the project in 1892. It is 175 feet (53.8m) high, and celebrates the famous battle of Waterloo in 1815. It was built on Arthur Wellesley's estate, which was given to the National Trust in 1933. The monument is built on the highest part of the Blackdown Hills (272m), and the National Trust is hoping to raise funds to restore it.

***Dee Woods***  
***27 February 2016***

