

Wednesday 25 July 2018, “What’s the Mutter” with Chris Gooding

One of the last of the really hot days of this amazing summer did not deter a sizeable group of around a dozen from meeting in the Mutter's Moor car park for a lengthy exploration of the outer bounds of the plateau.

We did the sensible thing by immediately descending down through the woods and onto the lovely shaded track that runs around the moor, about a quarter of the way down its eastern flank.

Turning north into the sensitively managed Greystone Hill Plantation, we were quickly rewarded with spectacular views over Sidmouth, gearing itself up for the forthcoming folk festival. We agreed that a lengthy spell of Morris dancing in that heat might just be pushing things a bit too far. Sensibly, nobody suggested that we have a go now and even more sensibly, nobody thought of bursting into song.



Continuing on along our shaded belvedere , we eventually came across the head of Sidmouth golf course at Bulverton Bottom, where we sensibly took an early hydration break.

A short incline followed, just to take us around Stoney Hill and onto a track that would fall again and continue to keep us in blissful shade as we circumnavigated Bulverton Hill and turned west, then north into the Otter valley. We stopped for more water and a rest just below Keble's Seat, where a track ran up to meet us from Newton Poppleford, looking so pretty nestled in the valley below without the sights and sounds of the traffic to spoil things.



So it now was that familiar landmarks became the topic of conversation as we made our way south now, still below the plateau, but soon to climb, up into the sunlight but also thankfully into a cooling breeze as we gained rim of the plateau.

There we stopped again for water under the shade of a rather small lone tree. The things you learn from animals!



A system of much wider tracks criss-crosses the heathland of the moor itself and the one that we chose took us back towards the car park. However, the original idea had always been to reach the coast before returning and so it was agreed that we would continue with that plan, heading towards the top of Seven Stones Lane.

The group members were rather shocked to learn that the stones that gave the lane its name were in fact part of a stone circle and were dug up and removed by Lord Rolle in around 1830 for use in a rock garden on the Bicton estate, where some of them can be seen today. However, it is rumoured that some of them were not used and are simply lying unused somewhere in the grounds.

One or two members felt very strongly that perhaps these stones should to be returned to their original site and perhaps steps could be taken to find a way of achieving this.

Once everybody had calmed down, we descended mercifully into the shade of the lane itself before emerging at the bottom to cross the road at the hairpin below the car park and into the open fields that lead gloriously towards High Peak and the coast.

However, on arriving at the coast path, we turned instead to climb steeply to the east towards the summit of Peak Hill where the cliff-top views to the west were truly magnificent.



After lingering for some time to take it all in (and to get our breath back!) we turned back inland towards the cars beyond the sun-scorched pasture and wondered at the shades of orange, brown and yellow in the fields around us. A reminder of droughts gone by that linger in our memories.

Chris Gooding