

Monday 18th March, "In the footsteps of Samuel Taylor Coleridge" with Iain Ure and Dee Woods

Despite a rather drizzly day, 16 keen walkers gathered in Newton Poppleford and set off for Ottery St Mary, the hard way. We headed East and crossed over the bridge to Harpford, at which point we had a poem about the River Otter. Then it was upwards through Harpford Wood, and steeply up again into Fire Beacon Plantation where the gradient eased a bit, but again a climb up to Hollow Head Cross. We were then on the ridge, heading for the coffee stop at White Cross, with somewhat misty views to the West. Prizewinning custard tarts were handed out by Rosemary Hatch, and Iain supplied appropriately named 'Rocky Road', for everyone to enjoy. The most well-known section of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' was read out before we headed down hill, happy that we had done all the uphill parts of the walk.



We walked down to the ancient Waxway Farm and Lane, then across the fields towards Wiggaton. We stopped in a beautiful woodland garden, full of fabulous Magnolias, camellias and early blossom trees, and listened to an abridged version of Kubla Khan. Then down towards the River Otter, where we stopped at the 'Pixies Parlour' and the 'Song of the Pixies' was read out.



Sadly, as it was noontide, we did not see any pixies about. Soon we were in Ottery, and called in at 'The Volunteer' for some welcome refreshments. Whilst waiting for the food to arrive, Iain handed each table a short but tricky quiz about Coleridge. Rosemary Hatch's table proved to be the most erudite.

Fully refreshed, we briefly visited the lovely Parish Church, before heading back towards the River Otter, passing the Tumbling Weir, and Mills under renovation, with additional newly built housing. Will this add to the flooding problems? We were interested to see the extensive tree planting in the water meadows, and enjoyed the stroll back to Tipton St John.

Unfortunately, the rain that had threatened us all day started to fall on the last leg, but we were almost back, weary but content after more than ten miles. What an enjoyable and varied walk, so many thanks to Iain Ure.

Dee Woods