

Short walks commenced in March 2007

***Hope's Nose and the Bishop's Walk, Torquay, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2007***

The combination of wet weather and the illness of some of our regular walkers meant that only 5 people were expected on the day. However, 9 people duly turned up at the car park and we set off in light rain. After a short distance, a glance back at the car park revealed that two other members had arrived late, closely followed by two more who arrived even later (no names here – you know who you are!). After a short delay the merry band, now 13 strong, continued on its way. This was an easy walk with some excellent coastal views throughout. It was made even more enjoyable when those of us who had faith in the weather forecast were vindicated and the skies cleared and the sun emerged. At this point, sunglasses were much more appropriate than waterproof trousers.

The delights of the Angels Tea Rooms at Babbacombe awaited us for lunch. This proved to be revelation to many of us, with an excellent choice of well-cooked food from a wide-ranging menu. And, yes, it really is full of Angels! A gentle walk back to the car park after lunch completed a delightful walk. Our leader maintained that the walk was only 4 miles – it seemed rather longer than that and it is hard to believe that we only managed 4 miles in more than 2 hours. Many thanks, as always, to Trevor for leading us and for introducing us to a lesser known part of Torquay.

Laurie

***Lustleigh Cleave, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2007***

Hmm... we woke to a very wet day and our first reaction was to forget Dartmoor and stay in bed. Driving in heavy rain on the A38 we were sure we should have obeyed this instinct. But we persevered and we and eleven other foolhardy walkers set off from Lustleigh village (which must be commended for its excellent public toilets). To reward us, almost immediately the rain began to let up. Led by John and Barbara we climbed out of Lustleigh and followed an undulating muddy path through the woods along the side of the Bovey River valley. The sun was by now beginning to appear between showers. There began to be complaints about being too hot and various items of clothing (including a pair of trousers) were shed. We stopped for lunch at a lovely spot by the raging river. Seemingly out of nowhere, Ruth produced a cake with two candles to celebrate the group's second birthday! The sun came out to reward us and it was more like April than February. After admiring the beautiful old houses and carpets of snowdrops, crocuses and daffodils at Foxworthy, we climbed up to Hunter's Tor and strolled along the grassy ridge of Lustleigh Cleave, passing an Iron Age settlement and enjoying views of Dartmoor bathed in sunshine. The last mile was not so good, a muddy slide between granite rocks on the descent to Lustleigh. I don't think I looked up from my feet once. After a ritualistic washing of boots in a water trough with a brush kindly left by the farmer, we reached the village. The mud made the walk harder than it might have been but it was nevertheless most enjoyable. Thank you John and Barbara for an excellent day.

Roseanne Benn

***Newton St. Cyres, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2007***

No fewer than 25 walkers (a significant number for this our 25<sup>th</sup>, silver jubilee, walk!), led by John Boyle, assembled in glorious sunshine in the Newton St Cyres car park. After a quick photographic session to commemorate this auspicious occasion, we set out in a long column for a seven mile circular walk. A steady climb up Riscombe Hill followed by footpaths through fields took us into the extensive woodland around Sherwood House. The recent rain had left sufficient mud to make spotting animal tracks easy – under guidance from John Philipson anyway – badger, deer, wild boar and even squirrel were noted. Another observation for the natural historians was the large masses of wood ants sunning themselves on top of the nests. Is this their way of heating up the nest after winter as suggested in the Guardian's Country Diary on the following Saturday? We came out of the woods on to the Whitestone Ridge and, surrounded by skylarks, walked east with wonderful views of the Exe estuary to the south and the rolling hills of mid Devon to the north, even as far as the Blackdown Hills. After passing Rowhorne Farm we turned north and stopped for lunch with an excellent view of the University bringing back happy (?) memories. We then descended through Coombeland Wood where we looked across a field to see a deer observing us carefully. Then on to Tinpit Hill (strange name for this centre of

manganese mining) and through a useful boot-washing ford. Finally back to the car park, to congratulate John Boyle on both a fascinating and varied route and his good influence on the weather.

Anne Sandall



February 07 Second Anniversary cake!



March 07 25<sup>th</sup> walk – with 25 walkers

### ***Exeter Canal, 21st March 2007***

With the colder weather and occasional sleet, Ruth and I feared that the short stroll group would be reduced to leader and back-marker. However we need not have worried – it was a beautiful morning with a clear blue sky, no frost and a crisp air that soon warmed in the sunshine.

Amazingly another 14 members and a dog joined us for a very enjoyable stroll, initially around the sewage works and through the Old Sludge Beds (now a nature reserve and much enjoyed by the dog) and then on to Topsham Lock. Here we rested for ‘elevenses’ enjoying the sunlit view of the river and Topsham and home-made cookies too. Returning along the other side of the canal we encountered a few walkers and cyclists, canoeists and rowers all enjoying in different ways a ‘cracking good morning out’.

We were back at Countess Wear in time for lunch and 50% of the group replenished themselves at the Tally Ho. The short walk concept was very successful and will be repeated so we hope others will join us.

On this occasion it was absolutely flat and conditions underfoot were firm apart from a ten yard section of mud.

Trevor

### ***Beer, Branscombe and Beer, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2007***

I’d been looking forward to this walk for some time. I’d never done it, but several friends had told me how attractive it was. The weather forecast was good, an important point for a rather wimpish walker like me! But, in the event, I might not even have been able to get started because, foolishly, I arrived at the car park in Beer with only a ten-pound note in my pocket and yet the parking charge was £3.20. Very kindly, David and Catriona and Keith rallied round and lent me the necessary cash.

By then, about fifteen or so had arrived and we duly set off across the cliffs in glorious sunshine with splendid views down the coast in both directions. After about half a mile, we plunged down into the undercliff walking in single file on a narrow and steep path. The landscape was extraordinary – dense, impenetrable vegetation with the chalk cliffs rearing up on one side and the shingle beach and sea on the other. When we reached Branscombe beach there was a parting of the ways. A dozen of us decided to continue with a walk round the hills surrounding the village, while the rest returned. We soon found ourselves walking through woods carpeted with blue bells and covered in sheets of pungent wild garlic dazzling white in the sun. The path was a bit steep in places but, apart from a brief section down the bed of a stream, the going was good. Looking down we caught glimpses of the village – a pretty church and attractive cottages scattered along the valley. We resisted the temptation to stop off at the pub returning instead to Branscombe beach for lunch. Here we ate our sandwiches looking out on the Napoli where cranes were busily unloading the containers onto a barge. Despite much talk of cholesterol levels, David and I treated ourselves to seriously good clotted cream ice creams and I was able to repay my benefactors. Then, after a very steep climb up from the beach, we walked back to Beer over the cliffs, enjoying the terrific sea views,

the sight of gambolling lambs and the warmth of the sun. We arrived back around 3 o'clock. As very much a novice walker I enjoyed it all enormously – the landscape, the perfect weather, the physical exertion, the company. It was a memorable day.

Jeremy Noakes

### ***Rowtor and West Mill Tor, 8<sup>th</sup> May 2007***

Ten intrepids met at Meldon Reservoir and set out across the dam in pleasant if dampish weather.. A nice contour to start and then down to the river followed by a steady ascent along Red-a-ven Brook. Amid darkening skies our leader briefly gave us the option of not going to the highest point but then set off up before anyone had the courage to state a preference for the easier option.

So it was uphill but rapidly downhill from the weather point of view – an hour of heavy rain, strong winds (fortunately on our backs) and a taste of what the youngsters on Ten Tors would get two days later.

However we got safely to West Mill Tor, almost the highest point on the moor, and then dropped (and climbed) to Rowtor for lunch in improving weather. After that it really was downhill all the way on a very pleasant walk through woodland and across the golf course returning to delightful valley below the reservoir.

In the security of the car park and with a warm drink in hand we reflected on, in Wallace's words, a grand day out – thanks to Mike and Suzanne.

Trevor Preist

Typist's note: No-one but ***no-one*** wanted to wimp out of ascending to the Tors (even if we couldn't see a THING at the first!) Total ascent on walk 1600 feet – according to Trevor's Casio watch.



***Mike says there is a Tor up there where we will have our picnic lunch.***



***Maybe he is right***



***But just how should we get round this boggy patch?***

### ***Heddon Mouth. North Devon, 24th May 2007***

This was a day to savour all the scenery and the wonderful bird life and bird song. The walk was through very varied countryside but the sun was constant.

We started on the coast with sea mist and such high cliffs that we could look down on the mist swirling beneath us. At lunchtime (see remark 1), when the mist had dispersed, we enjoyed the wonderful colours of the sea. After a short road walk with about 1.5 hours walking ahead of us (see remark 2), we dropped down through a steep combe and followed an easy track along the 'Ladies Mile'. We then returned through beautiful woods by the side of a delightful river to the National Trust car park and a delicious ice-cream.

Thanks John for a beautiful walk – with only six making the journey, a lot of people missed out on a super day!

#### **Remarks:**

1. Chief Cuckoo Detector (able to hear VERY FAINT calls at lunchtime): ***Patrick***. I am convinced that the shape of his hat acted somewhat like an ear trumpet. Later we all heard several more calling loudly.
2. Assistance to Grockles: ***Trevor***. A blue car with three in it paused to ask about car parking as they wished to get out and walk the coast path to Lynton/Lynmouth for lunch. This was at 1.45 and the estimated walk time for them would be 5 hours one way! It is true that on their (driving) map, it

appeared to be about 1 cm away. Trevor advised them to drive until they found a sign for Lynmouth saying 2 miles and THEN walk hoping that lunch was still available at 5pm!

Ruth Preist

### ***Exe Valley Walk, 6th June 2007***

A surprising number of walkers (21!) gathered at Bernaville Nursery, proving again that short walks are very popular. It was nice to see some new faces join the group. Leaving the road to Bramford Speke we took the driveway to Pynes, all admiring the trees, majestic oaks and knarled old pines (there were some knarled old knees in shorts too!!!). Glorious countryside, just no evidence of the city so close by, so peaceful. Taking an almost hidden path through Upton Pyne we passed through gardens and lovely pastures. We discovered a galleon treehouse and a tree tyre swing, all making such an interesting walk. Even at the end of the walk we were spoilt for choice, a light lunch at Bernaville Nursery restaurant or a cool pint at The Three Horse Shoes. Many thanks to Ruth and Trevor for this charming walk.

Barbara Philipson

### ***Henbury Fort, 15th June 2007***

Nine of us gathered at Buckerell on a day of uncertain vintage – torrential rain in the North and a promise of some for us by afternoon. Undeterred we set off in the wake of JP who, noting my new boots (birthday present), hastily revised the route to take in two cow fields with plenty of mud – and worse.

We all enjoyed the quiet ‘green’ lanes that led to Hembury and the luxuriant grass did marvels for my boots. The views showed East Devon at its secluded and picturesque best with no roads or cars visible.

We lunched at Hembury in an enchanting wood (worthy of Harry Potter or the Lord of The Rings) and then started a steady descent arriving at Awliscombe for a leisurely drink at a splendid pub before the final stroll back to Buckerell.

Everyone had a surprisingly dry day out and the promised rain waited until I reached the airport on the way back. Many thanks to Barbara and John.

Trevor Preist

### ***Exmoor: Withypool and Tarr Steps, 6<sup>th</sup> July 2007***

Nine of us arrived safely at Withypool for this delightful walk, having survived between us diversions at Dulverton and a lively ford and a fallen tree across the road on the route from Winsford! It was good to welcome Nick and Cathy Maguire on their first outing with the walking group. Starting off in the dry weather that, thankfully, was to accompany us for the whole of the walk, initial glimpses of distant valleys gave way to the sheltered, wooded banks of the River Barle on paths in surprisingly good order given the recent rain. From time to time we emerged into meadows looking very lush and verdant, before arriving at Tarr Steps where some of us retired to the local hostelry for lunch-time refreshment while others picnicked on the banks of the river. Crossing the medieval clapper bridge, still in good order despite the full and strongly flowing river, our immediate post-lunch challenge was a stiff climb up to the open, breezy fields above the river valley – just the thing to blow away the cobwebs!

The weather was increasingly sunny, visibility was good, and there were some lovely views to be enjoyed over the surrounding Exmoor countryside as we joined the Two Moors Way for the rest of the walk back to Withypool. Many thanks to Roger and Roseanne who led us expertly on this exhilarating walk – Roger claimed it as 7 miles, but my Pathfinder Guide suggests just over 8!

David Batty

### ***Ludwell Valley, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2007***

Fourteen of us (and one dog), met at the Tally Ho Inn on a perfect summer evening that seemed quite miraculous considering the floods in other parts of the country. We entered the Ludwell Valley Park from the Topsham road, and on the way to the top of the hill were rewarded with an extensive view to the North and West over city landmarks, and as far as Whitestone Beacon. At the top of the hill we had distant views to the South over the estuary and Exmouth, while to the East, in the foreground, the Pynes Hill business park and housing seemed surprisingly close. We paused for a moment to look at a field of cornflowers, other wild flowers, and barley for seed, which have been planted to encourage the rare Bunting to over-winter here. Then we crossed to the other side of the valley before dropping down into the valley itself. Down there the outlook was entirely rural, which made it hard to credit that we were only yards from houses and two miles from the city centre. Our route then followed a stream along the bottom of the valley, passed through an old plum orchard, and thus returned to the Topsham road. We then made a short diversion through the Crematorium grounds to pass the ruins of a paper mill, and so back to the Tally Ho for refreshments. Altogether the perfect short walk - evening sun, a light breeze, very little mud, and an appreciation of the Ludwell Valley's role as part of the 'green lungs' of Exeter. Many thanks to Tricia Bisley who devised and led this walk, and who gave a very informative commentary on points of particular interest.

Clive Bennetts

### ***Killerton – two walkers lost! 15<sup>th</sup> August 2007***

Twelve enthusiasts arrived for the leisurely walk around the Killerton tump. The weather was uncertain but in the event it developed into a very pleasant morning walking initially through the very attractive woodland and then onto the chapel and gateway of Columbjohn. The bull had been moved out of the nearby field which we had to cross so that was a relief. However this relief was short-lived as the back-marker (author) went awol and the two last members of the group lost their way while rabbiting on. The ex-marine insisted in going onwards and upwards ignoring Bob Witkin (who always read the small print of senate papers) insisting that the description of the walk said 'flat'.

The rest of the group were moderately concerned but thought that they were probably old enough to take care of themselves. In the event the optimism was justified and the duo beat us to the carpark and eventually we were reunited with much hilarity.

In the carpark the awol backmarker announced that this walk had seen the 500<sup>th</sup> participant and a simple quiz identified the winner of a celebratory bottle of wine – ex-marine Alan Hooper.

It was a very enjoyable and amusing walk rounded off by a pleasant lunch at the Killerton café.

Trevor Preist

### ***Bickleigh 22 August 2007***

On one of the sunniest days of the summer, 11 walkers enjoyed a walk from Bickleigh using footpaths and lanes. The group of 11 included the youngest walker to join the group, 10 year-old Nicky who came with John and Barbara. Although this helped to reduce the average age, unfortunately it did not result in any of us feeling any younger as we scrambled over the multitude of stiles.

The walk started from the car park next to the Bickleigh maze and we resisted the temptation to do the maze and have a cream tea instead of the walk. Following the lane through Bickleigh we admired the fine examples of thatching, particularly the dormer windows of Willis Farm at the end of the village, opposite the footpath which we followed up the first steep climb of the day, out of the Exe valley. We were rewarded with a clear view of Bickleigh Castle on the other side of the river, proudly displaying a flag, but from this angle looking more like a country house than a defensive castle.

In typical Devon fashion we immediately dropped down a steep bank to skirt Grattan Copse before picking our way through the yard of the very run down Burnhayes Farm, squeezing past a tractor apparently permanently parked across the path, climbing a mound of sawdust strategically dumped across the path and to one side noticing a large lake-like slurry pit in which another tractor was half submerged. Further on, after passing the farm house which appeared to have been recently modernised, we passed an overgrown tennis court and a number of very large fish ponds, suggesting that in the past this farm must have been far more successful. We followed the stream that fed the fish ponds, through an enchanting wood full of large ferns which was particularly attractive with the bright sunshine filtering through the trees to pick out the many shades of green. Unfortunately it was also

necessary to keep an eye on the surface path as it crossed an area of loose stones, similar to the land slips along the coast.

The walk then followed the Burn River valley, along a lane and footpath before making our way to the edge of Butterleigh. Instead of entering the village we turned north to climb by lanes and footpath to have lunch just below Cogwell. From here there was an extensive view towards the long East Hill ridge culminating in the Sidmouth Gap. The view was enjoyed by those who chose to sit in the sun and those who preferred to sit in the dappled shade of a tree. After lunch a further short climb brought us to Cogwell, the highest point of the walk at 237 metres, followed by a steep drop along a sunken lane with extensive views over Tiverton and the countryside to the north, reaching the floor of the Exe valley at Lower Collipriest. We then followed the path for 2 1/2 miles down river, past the Tiverton Water Treatment Works through Backs Wood, along the river bank and beside the mill leat to Bickleigh. Although the River Exe was flowing fast, brown with sediment, and getting quite close to the top of the bank in some places, the path itself was only muddy in the wood. At times we were walking through large beds of Himalayan Balsam growing over 6 feet high, which with their exotic blooms make an impressive sight, but unfortunately at the expense of other species of plants.

A very enjoyable walk through typical Devon scenery on a perfect summer day.

Suzanne Smith

### ***Lydford, 6<sup>th</sup> September – administrative cock-up leaves leader to go it alone on Dartmoor (see footnote)***

John Boyle arrived at the start near the Dartmoor Inn on the Tavistock Road on a beautiful morning.

Unfortunately after waiting for 30 minutes he was forced to start with only the three people who had traveled with him from Crediton!

Meanwhile at the Castle Car Park in Lydford, eight anxious walkers (all agreed that they were at the right grid reference) were wondering what might have happened to their leader, on a day when the A30 eastward had been closed following an accident. After half an hour and fruitless efforts to make phone contact the enterprising members identified a carpark near the Dartmoor Inn that seemed a much more suitable starting point.

With Mike Smith appointed as stand-in leader they drove back to the Tavistock Road, parked and then set off towards Great Links Tor. After about 20 minutes some vaguely recognizable figures were seen up ahead and miraculously the two groups merged into one amid much hilarity and relief.

The walk was really stunning with superb views in all directions from both Great Links Tor and from Widgery Cross. It was a splendid walk with very gradual climbs and gradients along an old commercial railway line and with a surprising number of other walkers in the same area.

Many thanks to John for an excellent day out.

Trevor

Footnote: John's instructions were to turn into the small lane just before the Dartmoor Inn. For clarity I erroneously added 'turn right' and also for certainty gave a grid reference for the Castle carpark. It had to be that one because on my 'old' map it was the only car park in the vicinity. Apologies to John and everyone else for the confusion – fortunately it all worked out alright in the end and I promise to use my new map in future!

Trevor

### ***UERSA Walking – French Connection, Thursday, 27th September 2007***

#### ***Petite promenade circulaire: Canal du Midi – au bord de la Garonne – 7 Km***

After a very hard six months testing their hammocks in the siesta time every day, Pam and Doug were really up for this. Literally! Up at just after 6 am to drive to Marmande to catch the 8 o'clock train to Toulouse.

Unfortunately no-one had told them about la greve (strike) at Gare de Toulouse! Allegedly about work rosters but in reality a cunning plan to disconcert the All Blacks also due to arrive that day.

The train from Marmande only went to Agen but the intrepid duo took it and then negotiated their way onto the TGV to Toulouse (only local trains affected by the strike) which got them to Toulouse, 1.25 hours later than planned, to meet the guides.

It was a grim day with no sign of the English Indian summer or the normal south of France warmth but fortunately the wind was at our back as we flashed along the Canal du Midi as it wound its way across Toulouse to meet the Canal Lateral. By the time we reached the junction of the canals – L'Embouchure – we spotted a little known bistro 'Chez les Rutrevor' and dallied there for a pleasant lunch.



Then it was up and along the Garonne with splendid views of the Toulouse skyline with Pam and Doug admiring the stunning bridges with their spectacular flood relief apertures. All of this was, (Sue Odell please note) dead flat and very undemanding (less so had we not eaten so much and so well).

At Esquirol we turned inland stopping at un petit magasin that specialised in products made of the traditional Toulouse blue pastel, the exploitation of which during the Renaissance by local merchants accounted for the development and wealth of the city. The home of one of these merchants, Assézat, now houses a stunning art collection of works by, among others, Bonnard and various French Impressionists. At Lectoure it is possible to be inducted into the various processes of extracting the pigment from the cruciform plant (known in England as woad), the one departure from the traditional method being, they assure one, no longer depending on urine in the dyeing process!

At the Capitole we saw an exhibition of splendidly decorated cockerels (1.5 m tall) the results of a competition to celebrate the Rugby World Cup, and later auctioned off for children's charities.

By now we needed the Metro for the last kilometre to get to the station in time for Pam and Doug's promised train (and avoid the rain). Fortunately the train was still running and the four of us said our farewells after a very enjoyable day together.

Doug and Trevor

### ***Exmouth - Budleigh Circular Walk, 19th October 2007***

Hedonists, otherwise known as Retired University staff, ambled the Jurassic Coast on a perfect Friday in October. Glorious weather and intelligent guides combined to make the walk from Exmouth to Budleigh Salterton one to remember. Seventeen of us set out from Sue and Patrick Kalaugher's house in Exmouth to tackle the World Heritage site. The headlands on the 'Southwest Way' proved less daunting than expected and the even Caravan park was negotiated without incident. Lunch on the cliffs, with some intrepid types dangling feet into space, was itself worth the price of admission. The return, having skirted/traversed the East Devon golf course, along the cycle trail through woods concluded a brilliant circuit. Yet, even further delights lay in store. Afternoon tea was taken in the Kalaugher's magnificent garden. Cakes -- carrot, fruit, brownies and more -- all wonderful and home-baked, were set out. We left reluctantly. When can we come again?

David Moss



***Incredible colours on the Exmouth – Budleigh walk and fantastic cakes afterwards!***

### ***Stoke Farm / Huxham Brake, 29th October 2007***

On Monday 29<sup>th</sup> October, a merry band of twenty or so gathered at the car park in Stoke Woods at ten o'clock sharp. A couple of late-comers were greeted with patient smiles, and the company set off on a short four mile circular walk from Stoke Hill to Huxham Brake. The weather was magnificent for late October – more like a warm summer's day with a bright blue sky and soft breeze to keep us cool.

On leaving the car park we immediately turned along a track to the right, running through Stoke Hill Farm. A little way along the path, we suddenly became aware of a silent watcher, and experienced a "Queen" moment. On the brow of the hill stood a magnificent stag – so still he could have been a statue! In a nearby pond, fish were

jumpin', and glittered in the bright sunshine. Moving on from such delights, we followed the path which took us along the ridge of the hill, offering us wonderful views across the valley to the hills beyond.

Gentle brown horses grazed in a field as we reached the next farm and arrived at the road at Stoke Post. We walked along a little way, and stepped aside for a few moments to enjoy a sun-dappled glade, ablaze with glorious autumnal reds and golds. We then crossed the road, and shortly turning off to the right, followed an ancient coppiced bridle path. Again we were surrounded by autumnal colours as the trees reached across to form a tunnel, and our walking boots were provided with just enough mud to give them a bit of a work out, but plenty of crisp fallen leaves to clean them up again. The path eventually emerged into open fields with splendid views of the valley with its pretty villages of Stoke Cannon and Huxham bathed in sunshine. After pausing to enjoy these, we turned sharply and our route looped back, again through open fields and woodland until we rejoined the original path along the ridge to Stoke Hill Farm, where descending, we viewed the Devon landscape from an even better perspective.

The fish was still jumpin' and the ol' stag was still standin'. It was a delightful walk, a perfect day, and great company. About half met up at Bernaville Nursery for a convivial lunch. Many thanks to Ruth and Trevor for this one!

Bob Witkin

### ***Exminster, 16th November 2007***

What a turn out! 20 members gathered at Kenn Church for the start of the walk. Initially the weather was kind to us, with a burst of sunshine, but it quickly became overcast and turned to rain in the afternoon. A very varied walk, including a very different aspect of the M5 looking into the canyon from above, along footpaths, country lanes, the canal towpath, and Exminster marshes, gave the walkers various different views of Exeter. Not too much wildlife on the marshes but we did see ostrich and alpaca on route. A swift half was had at the Royal Oak in Exminster before the return to Kenn. John and Barbara extend thanks to everyone who came along.

Barbara

### ***Morchard Bishop, 5th December 2007***

Last Wednesday we took a 5 mile walk in Mid Devon. Well, I knew that English academics are quite prone to self-torture but I hadn't realised how much they loved squelching in the mud when taking a walk as proof of ongoing British stubbornness and stamina; also to be reminded of their childhood and Victorian times, as I heard on the spot, and goodness knows how many more reasons to bear with a beatific smile all this self-inflicted misery.

I started protesting loudly while trying to keep my balance that there were kilometres of gravelled footpaths on Dartmoor that could be easily chosen for the winter walks of the group. It was only when some walkers lost their balance and fell into the mud that there was some acknowledgement of a rather unfortunate choice.

Anyhow, I did enjoy the walk as I managed to keep my balance and especially because Stephen had a map with him and the two of us chose to go back to the starting point on tarmac lanes with hardly any traffic at all. Also because our Guardian Angel had whispered to the sun to bathe in sunshine the old church at the top of Morchard Bishop village which was our destination. In the same village Stephen's eye picked out a metal plate on the wall of the old school commemorating the fact that Ernest Bevin attended it for a year. (Bevin was a formidable Labour politician in and after the 2nd world war with hardly any formal education, orphaned at the age of 8 and working at Bristol docks at the age of 11.) This little discovery made light of all the hardship we had bravely endured until then. We feel grateful the group of pensioned university staff exists to keep offering us more adventure and companionship.

Tina Maskell

A rather sheepish report I'm afraid from one, who probably got up a trifle tardy, failed to judge the traffic (exacerbated by the Christmas rush and wet conditions) and arrived too late for phase one of the walk. We made sure we were in good time at the midway meet point, which was just as well given the 15 minutes it took to don socks, boots, over-trousers, gaiters, hats and all the paraphernalia associated with the extremely dodgy weather conditions. The new couple we had been instructed to greet at the Morchard Bishop pick-up did not materialise, but luckily a rather shame-faced Trish arrived to share our embarrassment at opting to do only the 2 mile downhill stretch!



It seems we did quite well on seeing the state of the other 26 walkers, but we were not entirely without mud or incident on this 'easy' second phase walk, and when faced with a raging torrent of Olympic long jump proportions most of us opted for a precarious climb along two five bar gates that 'bridged the stream'. While I was working out a strategy to stay dry Nick managed to take the attached photo (below centre).

Although this obstacle slowed us down the intrepid walkers were spurred on by the thought of food at the Devonshire Dumpling and were not disappointed by the convivial atmosphere and Christmas spirit that greeted us when we found the first contingent of our group were already tucking in to a robust and tasty meal. We soon joined them and I think all voted it a great success and a remarkably good, and not too wet, outing in spite of the dreadful forecast.

Cathy Maguire



And finally a word from someone (in the advance party which didn't notice the gates!) who tried a different method of crossing – shades of Gerald Hoffnung:

I really enjoy walking with the group and chose the walk over the restaurant group last Wed. However ... it was ill-advised to do the whole walk for me, I guess, and unfortunately I left my stick(s) at home as I only decided to come (in the light of the rain) at the last minute. The stick wouldn't have prevented me from missing my footing on the stile with my muddy shoes, but it might have helped me cross the "river". I had David Batty holding one arm (on one bank) and Pat Kalaugher the other (on the other bank) but I sort of knew it was hopeless immediately I saw the situation. David said he'd underestimated the length of my stride (not helped by the waterproof trousers etc)!! "Jump as far as you can!" they exhorted me .... Alas, not far enough! I managed to dry out my boots to take with me to France the next day, but left the outer clothing drying at home.

Sue Odell