

Broadclyst, 18th January 2006

New Year – new walks. Seventeen members and an invisible man (more of that later) set out from Broadclyst on a fine mild day. Even though we weren't out at the crack of dawn, we were treated to a great view of three roe deer running and leaping across the field as they ran away from us.

Sue and Mike had found an interesting route around the Ackland Estate passing by Killerton and then on to Columbjohn, the original family seat where, en route (significantly), we made a detour to see the now closed family chapel and an historic gateway. After a pleasant lunch by a stream at Rewe, we headed back towards Broadclyst via Poltimore crossing between a large piggery encampment and a huge leek field. The piggery contained many piglets who were completely undeterred by the electrified wire (well above their ears) and who made frequent sorties into the next field to 'have a leek'. Further off in the leek field a large group of turbaned migrant workers happily filled enormous boxes with leeks. The group had been brought down by fancy coach from Birmingham – a modern mystery tour to the heart of Devon?

Eventually we reached the car park to be greeted by the invisible man – Alan Hooper. Arriving 5 minutes late (the car park wasn't easy to find) Alan had followed us around the circuit using his tracking skills as an ex-marine. His only mistake was when he asked two agricultural workers whether they had seen a group heading for Columbjohn. Yes, they had and 'that's the only way they could go'. Of course this had to be while we had made a detour to the chapel and so Alan beat us to the car park. However he enjoyed the walk as did everyone else.

Trevor Preist

Lyme Regis to Beer Walk, 22nd February 2006

Since the Undercliff walk was arranged 'by popular request' it was perhaps not surprising that despite it being a rainy and dispiritingly wintry morning there were nevertheless 10 eager walkers assembled at our meeting place, the hilltop car park at Beer. Our leader informed us that the turn-out would be larger than this because 4 others would be joining us on the X53 bus from Exeter (the Jurassic Coast special) which was to take us to our starting point. In the event 3 more walkers than expected (including new faces) were on the bus when it arrived at Beer taking our numbers to a truly impressive 17!

As we boarded the bus the excitement of members at the prospect of getting the views from the top deck without having to walk in the rain for them had to be tempered by our leader who insisted that no one was allowed to buy a return ticket! Our mood was further sobered by his additional injunction: 'no singing on the bus!' However the excellent views we enjoyed en route for Lyme led to a number of conversations on the theme of 'We should do it this way more often'!

By the time that we arrived at the Undercliff the weather had cleared a little but the signposted messages from English Heritage were calculated to maintain a feeling that we were about to embark on a significant ordeal. We were assured that there would be 'absolutely no access to the sea' area and that the nature of the walk would be challenging and 'arduous', warnings which prompted members of the group to feel that these signs were only relevant to the fainthearted tourist and in no way applicable to such a seasoned group of walkers as ourselves! In fact, having discouraged the grockles from participation, the well maintained signboards along the track proved very informative in describing the various areas of particular interest in the Undercliff and in recounting its history with the help of illustrative photographs. They even showed occasional attempts at humour: 'Here the earth moves.' It certainly did move – in a literal sense – for many of us because some stretches of the pathway were quite boggy and the general squelchiness acted as a very advert for the possession of walking poles. Those who had prudently brought theirs were clearly grateful for them, and those of us who had hitherto pooh-poohed the very idea were given reason to have second thoughts.

The most striking feature for those of us who were new-comers to the Undercliff was probably the sheer scale of it, its length, height and extraordinary width. The occasional ruin was particularly effective in helping us imagine the dramatic change in land use which had followed that first spectacular nineteenth-century landslip. So although this stretch of the coastal path is uncharacteristic in being deprived of sea views the group did not find it lacking, either for interest or for exercise; so much so, that some of us at the back had to curb the enthusiasm of the front markers by calling a halt for our lunch-time picnic.

Further welcome refreshment was provided by the Hook and Parrott at Seaton and, having congratulated us all on emerging intact at the Seaton end of the Undercliff, it was now our turn to pledge the health of our leader for choosing and organising such an absorbing walk. By this stage half of the group quite sensibly decided to return

by bus but for the rest there was the choice of returning via the cliff path either by way of the beach – ignoring the ‘Dangerous except at low-tide’ sign – or by the inland road. For some of us the final feature of a thoroughly enjoyable day’s outing was the facility to buy fresh fish down on the harbour at Beer.

Doug Sedge

Steps Bridge, 17 March 2006

Some twenty -two walkers (including the 'invisible man' this time!) assembled at the National Trust car park adjacent to Steps Bridge and braved a cold brisk day with a strong East wind. We had anticipated the cold - what we had not expected was to start with a long 'heart attack' hill right from the start! nevertheless everyone seemed to survive this early shock to the system, despite Trevor Preist and Alan Hooper risking another seizure by going back to the start to collect David Abbott from the car park - only to find that he was ahead of them further up the hill all the time!

Towards the top of the hill the group enjoyed shelter from the wind from the hedgerows as the wooded slopes gave way to typical Devon high ground farmland. We continued to climb and eventually arrived on moorland at the highest point of the walk. We no longer had the shelter of hedgerows to protect us from the wind - so inevitably now was the time to stop for lunch! however, everyone quickly took John Philipson's advice to 'get down in the bracken' and found themselves surprisingly comfortable - well, relatively comfortable!

We then dropped down off the moorland and followed a steep road down to the river Teign which we then followed back to the car park. The flat walk along the bank beside the meandering river was an excellent end to a very good walk which throughout was full of interest and contrast. Thanks to John and Barbara for organising such a good walk which at 7 miles was just the right length. We also appreciated that they had 'arranged' for the cold wind to 'on our backs' throughout the walk!

Alan Hooper

Hawkerland Valley, 25th April 2006

A group of 14 members completed a 7 1/2 mile walk starting from Joney's Cross, led by Mike Smith. At the start of the walk, low clouds were hiding the tops of the hills above Sidmouth and there were a few threateningly black clouds, but despite this it remained dry for the whole of the walk and became decidedly warm when the sun attempted to break through. The walk started by crossing South across the Hawkerland Valley to Stoneyford, then via Naps Lane to Yonder Hill, where it was noted that their Gardens are open every Sunday during the Summer, offering a pleasant venue for an afternoon out, including the unusual provision of DIY teas. The path was then continued down to the River Otter, which was followed past Newton Poppleford, after a short drink stop which enabled us to admire the view across the valley to Bulverton Hill and Muttters Moor, the early morning low clouds having cleared. The trees alongside the path included a number of Ash which were laden with their unusual flowers, appearing even more striking when the trees have no leaves. It was decided to have an early lunch next to Harpford Bridge, with the pleasant background sound of flowing water, although nobody was brave enough to try the temperature of the River Otter at this time of year. The walk resumed to the West, briefly following the East Devon Way before following the path to Venn Ottery. Here, we visited the church, which was still open despite scaffolding around its Norman tower, which is the oldest part of the building, while the interior included carved pew ends dating from the 15th Century. One of the other points of interest of this church is that the composer of the hymn "Rock of Ages", Augustus Montague Toplady held the benefice for Harpford and Venn Ottery for two years from 1766. Regretfully nobody had the confidence to lead a rousing rendition of this famous hymn in his memory, which may have been wise considering the state of the tower. We then continued westwards to rejoin the East Devon Way and return to Joney's Cross, where the four who had used their free bus passes from Exeter were impressed by the promptness of the return bus which arrived within 4 minutes of reaching the Cross, completing a very pleasant day.

Mike Smith

Belstone Common, Dartmoor, 12 May 2006

On a fine, sunny May morning 14 walkers gathered in Belstone car park for an adventure on Dartmoor. Most of the group were regulars but we were very pleased to welcome Luisa and Peter Quartermaine on their first walk;

in their eagerness they had arrived so early that they had already explored the village, locating the pub, before everyone else arrived.

Trevor gathered us together for a briefing, giving each of us a photocopy of the map showing our route in red with an escape route in blue for those who did not wish to go the full distance. Were we being sent out individually, after all? No compasses were provided so it was important to stay close to Patrick who came well equipped. Part of the walk would be on the Army's firing ranges but Trevor told us that he had been assured by High Command that there would be no firing that day. It was ominous that Alan (ex-marine) was not with us! We were advised not to step into innocent looking patches of water because they could be shell holes filled with water; we could end up waist deep in water! One of the naturalists with us advised that there could be adders in the long grass. The day promised to be exciting.

Staying in a close group we set off through the very pretty village, admiring renovated cottages, two chapels, the church and the stocks. Peter pointed out the pub. Out onto the moor we climbed steadily to Belstone Tor where the panoramic view was stunning. The weather was fine and sunny with a thin veil of cloud; the distant horizon only a little hazy. Our leader pointed out the peaks of West Mill Tor, High Willhays and Yes Tor (the highest point of the moor at 619 metres) to the west. Nearby, the map showed Irishman's Wall but there was little evidence on the ground and no Irishman around to explain it. We stayed on the ridge until Oke Tor when a short break for refreshment was taken. Shortly after, those wishing to get back early took the escape route. Down a steady decline, we eventually crossed a fast flowing stream, stepping carefully on the granite blocks. Everyone's hearts went out to a lone lamb who appeared to have become separated from its mother. No-one had the courage however to put it over their shoulders and carry it across the stream to the only other sheep in sight.

Climbing once more, our leader suddenly took a right turn at what seemed to be an arbitrary point, heading across grassland with no signs of a path. On the map we were just below the words 'Artillery Ranges'. Amazingly we eventually came down the other side of a ridge to cross Steeperton Brook at exactly the correct place. We reached Hound Tor (495 metres) for lunch, enjoying both sustenance and outstanding views all round. Apparently, on a clear day, Haytor is visible but the haze hid it from us.

Returning via Little Hound Tor, we came over Cosdon Hill where once more we could see the open country of North Devon. Conversation turned to the sight of a massive traffic queue on the A30 heading east. The most likely cause was roadworks at Whiddon Down and everyone discussed alternative ways back home. Heading back into Belstone we crossed the River Taw at an idyllic place where some thought it would be an excellent place to bring grandchildren. The naturalists having pointed out Skylarks at lunchtime now discussed whether it was Grey or Yellow Wagtails that could be seen darting about.

On getting back to the car park, Trevor had the final treat in store for us: tea and coffee, and a choice of Date & Walnut or Lemon Drizzle cakes baked by Ruth who had been left home to supervise some work on the house. Our thanks to Ruth for the welcome, delicious refreshment and to Trevor for planning and leading such a delightful day on the moor.

Keith Tizzard

Editor's note: The outcrop on the map adjacent to the legend 'High Willhays' has a height of 618m – less than Yes Tor and Keith has accurately reported what the 'idiot leader' said on the day. However 100m south of this outcrop there is another with altitude 621m. The two outcrops presumably form High Willhays which is therefore reinstated as the highest point on Dartmoor.

Postbridge, 23rd June 2006

18 walkers ably led by John and Barbara Philipson had an excellent circular walk from Postbridge. Although the sky was somewhat grey, it was warm, with hardly any wind. What the leader did not tell us was that the route we were to follow could have been part of a river crossing course, which I am pleased to report was completed without anybody falling in. From Postbridge we went North up the Western bank of the East Dart, crossing Braddon Lake stream on the way to the beautiful waterfall South West of Sandy Hole Pass, which was still impressive despite the long spell of dry weather. Having crossed the East Dart at the waterfall we continued to Sandy Hole Pass on the Eastern bank, then ventured across rough tussocky grass for a short distance before our skillful leaders found us a path which led all the way to Statts House, a simple shelter for 19th Century peat

cutters. Although only the lower levels of the walls of the shelter remain, the interior still has the remains of the fireplace which must have been a particularly welcome feature for the workers on a wet, windy day. After a pleasant leisurely lunch we continued West to Sittaford Tor which was clearly visible from Statts House. This involved crossing the upper reach of Little Varracombe, one of the tributaries of the North Teign River, which was accomplished through very careful dodging of the wettest spots and trusting that the blanket bog over the stream would cope with our not inconsiderable weight. Having completed this manoeuvre without getting too wet, we climbed up to Sittaford Tor and continued down the Eastern side to eventually reach the Grey Wethers Stone Circles. Because of the slope of the land, it is not possible to see the circles until you are almost on them. At this time of the year the grass around the stones is surprisingly high considering sheep are regularly grazing this area, and the circles stand out much more clearly later in the year. From the Circles we went South to meet the East Dart River and to follow it back to Postbridge, to complete a very enjoyable 8 mile walk.

Mike Smith

Shaldon, 19th July

On a day described as the hottest on record in some parts of the country, seven intrepid walkers hiked along the coastal path between Shaldon and Babbacombe. Early on there were lovely views over Teignmouth and on one part of the walk we encountered a magical piece of woodland sculptured by nature where all you could hear was the hum of bees. As a concession to the weather we opted to take a higher route around one of the severer up and down bits. These parts of the walk Trevor Preist describes as the 'nice bits'! On reaching Babbacombe our treat was tea at the Angel Café, the warm scones and Devonshire cream teas are not to be missed.

Frankie Peroni

Badgworthy Water / Doone Valley, 15th August

Nine of us met at Dry Bridge car park at 11am and were briefed by our leader, John Boyle, as to the proposed walk, after which we set out on a dull but fine day. We walked across the moor aglow in flowering heather for approximately three miles of reasonably flat conditions into a slight head-wind. Then we started to descend into wooded terrain towards the noted Doone Valley (no sign of Carver or Lorna?). Here we found remains of a medieval village and some time was spent inspecting and contemplating. Further along the valley we stopped for lunch on the banks of Badgworthy Water enjoying John's delicious sweet tomatoes and viewing the countryside. We moved on and came across a commemorative plaque to Blackmore and the Lorna Doone book and at this point met up with a number of campers (the tented types) at their site in the vicinity of Oak Church. At this point we had a steep climb (much gasping) back up to the Moorland and returned to the car park at Dry Bridge. Distance covered was approximately eight very enjoyable miles.

David Abbott

Belstone Cleave, 13th September 2006

Undeterred by a somewhat discouraging weather forecast, a party of 13 met at the Finch Foundry at Sticklepath for a short (easy) walk of 4 miles led by Trevor Preist. We followed the River Taw through woodland crossing and re-crossing the river several times (by bridge), before climbing a gentle slope to Belstone village. Returning along a bridle path we found that we split into 2 groups; one, led by Ruth, decided to climb to the white rock where John Wesley is reputed to have preached in 1744, the others followed Trevor and Alan Leadbetter towards lunch and a drink at the Taw Inn. Almost all the group joined us there for good food and refreshment in the pub garden. In the event, the weather was fine and warm and the walk was enjoyed not only by the less ambitious but also by those who are usually more demanding of distance and terrain.

Mary Ravenhill

Culmstock Beacon, 20th October 2006

What a splendid turn out, 20 members gathered at Culmstock Church. Yes, the yew tree still grows on the Church tower. John and Barbara Philipson led this 8 mile walk to the Wellington Monument. First we had the challenging, flinty and muddy climb up to Culmstock Beacon. For our effort we were rewarded with stunning

views. This beacon, on the edge of Blackdown Common, was part of the network of beacons set up cross England to provide an early warning system at the time of the Spanish Armada.

We moved off then across Blackdown Common heading for the Wellington Monument. At this point we could have eventually found ourselves in Taunton as our leader missed a stile tucked into the hedgerow. John took some ribbing for this. On arrival we were disappointed to find that the monument was fenced off due to a safety problem. The monument was erected by local gentry to celebrate the Duke of Wellington's victory at Waterloo in 1815. A short lunch break was taken here.

The return journey was a mix of fields, woodland paths and country lanes; passing by apple orchards and the beautiful Culm Pyne Barton farm mentioned in the Doomsday Book. Overall the weather was very kind to us and everyone enjoyed the day.

Barbara

What a dreadful weather forecast we had for the October walk from Culmstock! It was wonderful to see how many members ignored the storm warnings and, as usual, we were rewarded by the Met Office being wildly pessimistic and had a great hike with sun for a good part of the route.

20 walkers, including some newly retired and therefore super-sprightly (can anyone guess who?!) followed John (Philipson) along lush green, *muddy!*, pastures beside the River Culm before climbing to the Culmstock Beacon, a remarkable stone structure with its fascinating history of preparing for the Armada.

We then had magnificent sunlit views to south and west along Blackdown Common before entering a wood. We finally approached the Wellington Monument via a field, thanks to back-marker Barbara, who managed to keep a tight reign on her leader husband chatting and steaming off into the distance! This was our first view of the monument where we stopped to picnic. The return trip commenced via a beautiful wood and was then along a road as the Culm was in spate and John didn't want to douse the keen members by allowing them to slip from a very wet log crossing. The warmth, dampness and time of year provided some remarkable fungi to study but I didn't notice any being gathered to eat later.

Thanks, John – a great walk along paths that were new to almost all of us!

Ruth

Scorhill Down, Kestor Rock, 21st November 2006

Armed with the prospect of a hearty pub lunch later in the day, the first challenge of the some two dozen walkers who ventured out on a November morning was to navigate the narrow twisting lanes in the area of Gidleigh to find our starting point at Scorhill Farm. That safely achieved, we then followed our leader for the day, John Boyle, in driving rain uphill to the Bronze Age Scorhill Circle, unique amongst Dartmoor stone circles in never having been restored. Fortunately, thereafter, the rain blew itself away and much of the rest of the walk was undertaken in less inclement weather.

The walk was four miles in length and John Boyle told us that he takes visitors along this trail to introduce them to the variety of scenery to be found on Dartmoor: the walk showed us why. We enjoyed its contrasting attractions including clapper bridges and ancient marked tracks on the open moor; the splendid views from Kestor Rock (437 metres) towards Chagford, Castle Drogo and, further afield, Exmoor; and the wooded valley of the North Teign River.

Two and a half hours later we were back at Scorhill Farm and ready for a leisurely lunch at the attractive and very rural pub at Wonson, some two miles distant, although perhaps a little longer for those who found themselves taking less direct routes!

Thank you, John, for introducing us to this short but stimulating walk.

David Batty

Drewsteignton, 6th December 2006.

About a dozen of us gathered in the car-park below Drewsteignton church. In the grass above the park, there was a row of cider apple trees donated by different named families in the area. We arrived in sunshine, but started off in rain, which soon cleared giving us mostly mixed sunshine and cloud during the day.

For about half the walk we followed the Two Moors Way, mostly along tracks, quiet lanes and over fields. As we left the road for the first time, we passed a series of striking bronze and stone sculptures set along the track. We traversed the A30 twice en route and were relieved when we were far enough away to escape the continuous noise. After the first traverse, the path took us through wet fields to a stream, where the little bridge was blocked by a fallen tree, and we had to jump over the rain filled brook. This was not the first of the various water hazards we met. The next hazard was a water-splash by Hittisleigh Mill on the upper Yeo. We were thankful that the water had dropped from its storm level earlier in the week, but several of the party found that their boots were not tall enough to keep the water out. After walking up through a pinewood, where we needed a fungus specialist to tell

us what could be eaten, we lunched at the corner of a field overlooking Cosdon. Tracks and lanes took us to publess Crockernwell.

A very wet green lane was the next challenge, before we were greeted by a pack of mixed dogs at the next farm. We looked back at this farm from the other side of a little valley where we had forded another stream and passed two pigs, including a friendly Wessex Saddleback. Passing Coombe Hall on a farm road between a new fence and an old hedge, separating a field of horse from a field with both beef cattle and sheep, we climbed up to a cross roads. Down to Burrowe Farm, with a nosy horse below a curious cob pillar and a final water feature, where we had to hop through more mud to get round the tree blocked track. Out onto a grassy field and the path led up along the line of a Devonshire bank carrying holly bushes, some shining scarlet in the sun. Over a style, up the track to the car park past the Drewsteignton childrens playground, which one of us could not resist testing. It had been a challenging walk in the very wet ground conditions, with at least ten different sorts of mud. We thanked our leader and left after wishing all our friends on the walk best wishes for a Happy Christmas, looking forward to meeting again in the New Year.

John Boyle.

P.S. Mike was ill and unable to lead the walk. Many thanks to Suzanne for stepping into the breach.

Thanks to David Oates for the photo from the September walk – approaching Belstone (the only little bit of UP!) Please note the professional handling of the poles, elegant style of hats and preponderance of well-worn boots.

