

The first walk of the newly formed group was in February and there was no walk in December 2005

Green Circle Walk (February)

Eighteen intrepid walkers turned up for the first meet on a fine cold bright sunny morning including Doug & Pam Sedge who had just flown in from New Zealand (especially for the occasion?) and Roger Fieldhouse who had raced back from his holiday in Cuba. Greeting long lost friends enhanced the occasion and illustrated the value of UERSA. The walking route was moderate and the pace set by Mary Ravenhill and young Leadbetter was brisk. At Crossmead the small group of morning walkers sought out Tommy Reversz in the lounge (-he had craftily taken the bus-) and were rewarded with free coffees (financial crisis - what financial crisis?). They then continued via Ide, Alphington and Marsh Barton to the canal and then the Quay.

The larger group pressed on to the canal and then on along scenic routes through Ludwell Valley and Mincinglake Country Parks. A few chose intermediate end points but half the original group completed the 11-mile 'Exeter Green Circle' arriving in a minor blizzard.

Well done everyone! See you next time and encourage others to join you!

Budleigh Coastal Walk (March)

Over 20 members, including a dozen who had not been on the Circle walk, were rewarded with a very pleasant walk along the coast to Ladram Bay. For most of the time the expected showers didn't materialise. The early walking was easy and, when the pub lunch contingent turned inland for Otterton, the more energetic pressed on to Peak Hill for a picnic lunch and then to Otterton. The stroll along the Otter back to Budleigh presented no problems after refuelling was completed.

Haldon Forest (April)

Eighteen members (undeterred by the Met Office's forecast of wet weather) and including three new faces started from the Ley Arms at Kenn on a walk through the forest led by Barbara and John Philipson. They were rewarded with a beautiful morning with some splendid views of the Devon countryside and out over the Exe estuary particularly from the Obelisk where some wise folk ate their picnics. The recent rain made the going very wet and sticky underfoot but those choosing both the six and eight mile options enjoyed the walk which ended at the Ley Arms for lunch (early and late) and for a short discussion on future possible walks.

Dartmoor Walk (May)

A very select band of intrepid walkers - John & Barbara Philipson, Bert Rush, John Sandall, Ray Dawe and myself - strode off into the mist towards Bonehill Rocks, Chinkwell and Honeybag Tors and those not familiar with the area took the leader's word for their existence. Fortunately within 30 minutes the mist started to lift and it developed into a warm, sunny day. As we climbed up towards Grimspound we could look back on the splendour of the tors we had barely glimpsed. We had lunch at Grimspound and then a nice easy but long walk along Hamel down and down into Widdecombe. Thanks to all who were not deterred and particularly to Bert Rush who is the only one to come on all walks so far.

The A team (decimated to Ruth and Esmee Sykes) set off in the opposite direction for Buckland Beacon stopping at all tors in between for, as it turned out, a very long time. The two parties were due to meet in Widdecombe but the Grimspound group (11 miles) failed to sight the others so Bert and John volunteered to slog up the hill to the car park on the ridge while the rest checked out the pub. They returned to collect the rest of the party and, when all reached the car park there were still no signs of the Buckland birds. Fearing the worst, there was some discussion about the rescue helicopter and much scanning of the horizon with binoculars. Eventually two (slowly-moving) figures appeared over the near horizon and were positively identified as the ladies in question. It transpired that the route (6 miles) had been completed in full at a leisurely and enjoyable pace (4.5 hours) with stops at each tor* for refreshment, chats about old times when the children were young and fascinating facts provided by Esmee on the industrial archaeology of the area. Intermediate stops studying spring gentians and owl pellets also enhanced - and extended - the walk. A classic example of how time flies when you are enjoying yourselves.

(*No, Trev, we didn't stop at the first two tors which were only about 100 yards from the car park!)

Kentisbeare (June)

Fifteen members met at Kentisbeare on a beautiful summer's morning with the promise of a hot day ahead. Fortunately Mike and Suzanne had foreseen that possibility and much of the walk was along leafy paths and through a rhododendron wood along the ridge. We lunched at a spot on the ridge with open views towards

Bradninch and Silverton from a height of about 800 ft. We were only disturbed by the eerie sound of the gliders above, launched from the field nearby. After lunch it was a steady downhill walk to the Priory at Kerslake and then on to the pub at Kentisbeare to re-hydrate. Special memories - a huge sloping field covered in purple flowers which were magnificent potato plants and later going through two beautiful fields the quality of bowling greens which we discovered were those of a turf company! A great day enjoyed by all who were able to make it.

The Quantocks (July)

A group of eight led by Roger Fieldhouse had a very enjoyable walk in the Quantocks on a beautiful summer's day. The opportunities for refreshment helped the walkers enjoy the scenery in a very relaxed atmosphere.

A stroll along the Exe (August)

Three members and a dog joined Trevor for a morning stroll to Double Locks along the Exe and through the Country Park. Numbers were swelled by the arrival of Bert Rush at the pub and after some light refreshment we strolled back along the other side of the river.

Salcombe - Weston Mouth Branscombe walk (September)

Ten walkers set off from the car park opposite the Norman Lockyer Observatory with low cloud around and a rather unsatisfactory forecast for the afternoon. After several severe undulations we were down to beach level at Weston Mouth before climbing again. But this time, after reaching cliff-top level, the walking was mainly on the flat as far as the outskirts of Branscombe where a lunch break was called before a visit to the pub in Street. A quiet road was followed to the Donkey Sanctuary and then through fields and along a track through the woods back to the car park. All was achieved in perfect walking conditions, the rain having not arrived. Once again the organisation was faultless, even to the extent of providing a gentle uphill tarmac surface immediately on leaving the pub. There could be no excuses for stumbling.

The following mood swings were noted:

The clouds at cliff-top level made the first of the stiff climbs appear somewhat less steep when viewed from across the valley. We only felt depressed when the clouds cleared and the full steepness was revealed. It was then that we remembered that we had at least been spared the climb out of Sidmouth so warm feelings for the organiser soon returned. Further along the coast these feelings were severely challenged by the realisation that, for all we knew, we would be making the return journey along this same switchback route. However, encouragement soon came when word was passed down the line that the return would be made via an inland route. Morale remained high throughout the rest of the walk, there being no takers for the shorter option.

Pat and Sue Kalaugher

Haldon (October)

It was very good to have four new faces among the sixteen walkers who set off from Kennford. On the climb to the Haldon ridge we just about reached the shelter of the trees before the first rain. We lost the views but the rain was not that heavy and we were able to enjoy all the walking.

As we reached the Lawrence Tower, Trevor Preist recognised a friend, Tim Legood, who was on the point of leaving after attending a meeting. We were invited inside the tower and given a short talk about the history and recent restoration of the tower. Outside, this interesting break was completed with a demonstration of a Korean stringed instrument formed from a beech tree.

We made our way back to Kennford at a lower level, passing through Dunchideock and Clapham. John and Barbara Philipson had organised an excellent route, with all the main uphill stretches completed early in the day. The cream tea they generously provided at their home in Kennford was most welcome and more than made up for the damp conditions experienced on the walk. We went our separate ways very much refreshed.

There is no hint in the above factual description of the walk that other factors were at work. When the weather closes in there is a natural tendency for the mind to turn in on itself. It was on the steady climb to the ridge that the idea of a cream tea was becoming more and more attractive. Perhaps, though, there was an undisclosed minimum mileage qualification? Our worst fears were confirmed when we were lined up for a group photograph. It wasn't the photograph itself that was the problem so much as the realisation that it was being taken at the point furthest

from Kennford. There could be only one reason for it: to eliminate anyone who had not completed the full walk. After that nobody dared take any of the short cuts which, suspiciously, seemed to be offered at every crossroads.

Pat and Sue Kalaugher

Castle Drogo (November)

The 10th monthly meet of the group was graced by the Chairman who, having paid an enormous sum to the Met Office to ensure a good day, turned up at Fingle Bridge to bravely face a barrage of incredulous comments as he emerged from the car. Thanks, Laurie, we all enjoyed your company.

After some uncertainty at the start when our marine 'scout', Alan Hooper, fortunately discovered that the Fingle Bridge Hotel was in fact, in a former existence, the 'Angler's Rest', we set out along the Fisherman's path following the Teign heading upstream. The path was wide, fairly flat but rather muddy apart from an unplanned cul-de-sac involving a steep bank climb to extricate ourselves.

Our number on this occasion was 22 - just about a record - and the easy route enabled the conversation to flow. We crossed the river and a steady climb brought us up to the Hunter's path below Castle Drogo with stunning views of the Teign valley on a sunny autumn day. Forward planning had ensured that the Castle N.T. café was open and the group descended on the unsuspecting staff who were expecting a quiet Friday morning. During the coffee break, we were joined by David Abbott and two ladies who had arrived at Fingle Bridge for a 10.30 start. This was a significant improvement on the October meet which they had done twice - the first time arriving at Kenn a month early. We established that they were now doing the walk in the reverse direction to everyone else but planned to join us at the ex-Angler's Rest.

After a leisurely coffee we strolled along the rest of the Hunter's path enjoying the fine views and then descended through the woods to the pub. Our arrival en-masse drew muttered comments about 'coach party'! A very pleasant social lunch with excellent food rounded off a splendid day and the departing walkers looked forward to our next meetings in the New Year.

Trevor Preist