

UERSA WALKING GROUP

January – March 2009

Dates: Wednesday, 7 January (short) Monday, 19 January Thursday, 5th February (short)
Thursday, 26th February Tuesday 10th March Monday, 23 March (history stroll)

Another year over with 21 walks making a total of 61 so far and almost 1000 participants to date! Interest is growing with a steady flow of new members joining the group and enjoying the social interaction as well as the gentle (or sometimes not so gentle) exercise. The leaders are great turning up with new and interesting walks but if anyone wants a repeat of their favourite then please let me know. The new programme has a gentle start at Escot to combat the inevitable over-eating and ends with an innovation suggested by Mary Ravenhill – a stroll around Exeter Castle with an expert on its history, Bob Higham.

*Happy New Year to you all
and make sure that regular walking with us or on your own is on your ‘must-do’ resolution list.*
Trevor



River Teign in December

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

- **10.30 am Wednesday, 7th January Escot 4 miles**

Leave the A30 at the Fenny Bridge / Fairmile exit just before Honiton. Turn right and right again and then bear left onto the old A30 into Fairmile. At the village turn right and the entry to Escot Park is on the right just after you have crossed over the A30. Follow the paved road to the entry and park in the larger car park beyond the toilets. (GR080983)

The walk will be a leisurely one around the countryside adjoining the park returning to Escot in time for lunch at the Coach House Restaurant.

Trevor

- **10.30 am Monday, 19th January Landscope, Woolston Green near Buckfastleigh 8 miles
PACKED LUNCH REQUIRED**

Meeting and parking at Landscope Church, Woolstone Green. OS Explorer Map Grid Ref 775664.

Car Park opposite Church.

From the A38 Expressway take second exit for Ashburton. At T junction turn left, signposted Landscope, 3 miles.

Steep climb initially then road narrows - care advised. Straight through Parkfield and Thornecroft and as you approach Landscope look for sign for Hill House Nursery. The turning for Church car park is 100 yds further on the right, car park opposite Church on the left.

The walk includes one very steep climb and chances are it will be very muddy.

Contrasting airy upland and superb views with a deep and luscious valley, on this walk in a hidden and almost unknown triangle of Devon countryside. Mostly good tracks and public byways (more like bridle paths). Small amount of road walking on quiet lanes. The walk takes us through Woolston Green then heading south to Wash and Well before turning north to Higher Beara Cross, High Beara, Lower Coombe, Bulland, Parkfield. We then return to our starting point via Parkfield and Gulliford.

The walk takes in Lower Coombe, Baddaford, Parkfield and Gullaford.

John and Barbara

- **10.00 am Thursday, 5th Feb** **Exe Valley Way, north of Thorverton** **5 miles**

A quiet road walk in early February with lovely views across the Exe Valley. Catch the 55 bus at 10.15 from the Exeter Bus Station (or along its route via Stoke Canon) alighting at Thorverton Turn (10.32). The walk is then one mile along the level road into Thorverton before climbing via a rarely used road to Bidwell Cross and on towards Pitt Farm with excellent views across the valley. The road then drops to reach Bickleigh Castle, the Fisherman's Cot and Bickleigh Mill i.e. FOOD! (Return buses from Fisherman's Cot are at 09 and 39 minutes past the hour.)

Ruth and Trevor

- **10.00 am Thursday 26 Feb** **Circular walk from Crediton, via Shobrooke** **5 miles**

About half of the walk is along lanes, the rest is along rights of way across fields. Start is from the Crediton Leisure Centre car park. (To get to the leisure centre from the Exeter direction along the A377; past the Crediton Shell station advance up Exeter Road and along Charlotte Street. Just past the Fire Station and before the church, turn right in the direction of Tiverton along East Street. At the end of East Street, turn left into Mill Street, still in the Tiverton direction. The main road swings round to the right into Exhibition Road. Almost immediately a sign for the Leisure Centre directs you right into Commercial Road, follow this past playing fields on your left. Turn left into the Leisure Centre and park somewhere.)

From there we follow a footpath to a foot bridge over the River Creedy. Then past the Creedy Court nursing home, lanes and tracks to Toe Mills. The track goes along the line of the old leat, and "in early spring the verges are a mass of snowdrops". We continue to Shobrooke, Shobrooke church (Anglo-Norman) and up to the top end of Shobrooke Park. The track goes along an avenue of limes and chestnuts and passes above the ornamental lakes, which usually carry a range of water birds. Then back via the path to the Crediton Leisure Centre car park. We should be back in Crediton by 1 pm so a packed lunch is optional.

John Boyle

- **10.00 am Tuesday 10 March** **Moretonhampstead** **8 miles**
PACKED LUNCH REQUIRED

Start : Moretonhampstead Car Park (Grid Ref. SX 751860)

Distance : 8 miles

Terrain : Footpaths and lanes

Route : Moretonhampstead ~ Buttendon ~ Cranbrook ~ Uppacott Cross ~ Great Parford ~ Sunnyfield ~ Saint Hill Farm ~ Sloncombe ~ Bughead Cross ~ Dartmoor Way ~ Moretonhampstead

Mike and Suzanne

- **10.00 am Monday 23 March** **Exeter Castle**

Meet at the Gate House to Rougemont Castle in Castle Street.

Bob Higham of the Archeology Department has had a specialist interest in Rougemont Castle and its history. He will lead a leisurely stroll around the Castle and parts of the city wall stopping to share his insights into the events that shaped its history.

The walk will have finished by 12.30.

Bob Higham

RECENT WALKS 2008

New Bridge, 24th September

On 24th September, 9 members joined Mike and Sue on a 9 mile walk from New Bridge. Mike started by explaining that this area was a notorious haunt of pixies and local stories included one of a young boy disappearing after venturing into the wooded valley, but fortunately the only spirits we encountered were high spirits in the bright sunshine. We walked alongside the Dart to the pool at Spitchwick where we resisted the temptation of a swim, limiting our exposure to a cautious test of the water temperature with our hands. After noting the path down which we would descend, we continued past the grand entrance to Spitchwick Manor with its impressive gate lodges to start ascending a road above the River Webber, signposted to Lower Town, despite the lane clearly going up a steep hill. After passing through the hamlet of Lower Town with its unusual terrace of estate worker's cottages, we continued the steep climb to Leusdon Church, now appreciating that although Lower Town is in fact on a hill, it is considerably lower than Leusdon. At the church some of us looked inside, and although it is not one of the ancient Devon buildings it does contain a number of interesting memorial tablets, including one to an aviator who went missing while flying over the trenches in the First World War. We had hoped we might see the harvest festival display but we were just too early as the lady doing the display arrived just as we were leaving. A very convenient stepped cross in front of the church provided an ideal place for us to sit in the sun and enjoy a morning coffee and a chat, but eventually having to make the effort to continue our walk up the hill, past the pretty cottages and farm at Ponsworthy, and then to join the Two Moors Way at Lock's Gate and to continue across Sherberton Common to Bel Tor, after having a lunch sheltered from the strong breeze by the boundary wall of Primm Cottage. Although the direct route to Dr. Blackall's Drive was to the East of Bel Tor it was decided that as it was such a beautifully clear day we would make the extra effort of climbing up to the Tor to enjoy the impressive view over the wooded valley of the Dart. We then followed Dr. Blackall's Drive and continued on to Leigh Tor, where Mike reported on reading that this was the only Tor on Dartmoor which did not consist of granite. Unfortunately the article had not identified what the rock is, so an impromptu scientific survey was undertaken resulting in various suggestions. Mike subsequently found a reference describing it as a good example of quartz/tourmaline rock. After the scientific discussion we continued down a very steep path through the bracken to Spitchwick Pool, to return along the side of the River Dart to New Bridge, on the way passing a small group on the grassy banks having a luxury champagne picnic, but unfortunately we were not invited to join them.

Mike

Dawlish Warren, 10th October

Blue sky and brilliant sunshine was the order of the day for the Dawlish Warren walk. A fair size group met at the car park, and after a discussion on the near matching price of car parking and rail fare from Exeter, we set off! I spotted a seal watching us from the waves as we crossed from the dunes to the beach, and we continued around the far end of the Warren. A lone boatman sunning himself on the far beach turned out to be an ex-employee of the University, and unfortunately the boat was too small to take us all for a trip around the bay. The tide was on its way out, exposing plenty of mud flats, so the resting birds were some way off, but oyster catchers, egrets and cormorants could be seen. The views up the Exe estuary were wonderful and there was plenty of action of the golf course, as we walked back along the top of the dunes to the shops and visitor attractions. A few walkers decided to lunch at Powderham before heading homeward.

Elsbeth Holmes

Exmouth & Budleigh Salterton, 22nd October

The forecast promised occasional showers early morning but much brighter later. Driving along the road to Exmouth, it looked pretty dire but it didn't deter the sixteen who turned up. We sheltered in Patrick and Sue's porch until 10.40 and then set off bravely in light rain which petered out in 5 minutes and turned into bright sunshine for the rest of the day!

Sue assured me that this wasn't just a re-run of last year's walk in the reverse direction – and so it proved to be; there was little that I recalled as we followed an inventive route to the disused railway / cycle way leaving quickly at Budleigh to avoid the 'rifle range' in a cutting. Then it was across the golf course keeping heads low for flying balls rather than bullets but not low enough to avoid a branch dislodging a lens from someone's spectacles. Fortunately a diligent search recovered it and a first-aid repair was completed.

We lunched on the cliffs above Sandy Bay in beautiful sunshine with splendid views and then strolled slowly back to Chez Kalaugher for the promised, long-awaited and definitely delicious afternoon tea and cakes.

Thanks to Patrick and Sue for the splendid walk and hospitality.

Trevor

White Cross and the River Otter, 5th November

Who can forget the pictures of the horrendous floods through Ottery St Mary on 30 October? The UERSA walk had been planned in this region months before so there was uncertainty as to whether the walk would be possible. Mike, however, walked the Otter paths on the Monday five days after the floods and pronounced it suitable so 18, including two new walkers, gathered at White Cross Car Park, East Hill for the commencement of the walk. Early morning greyness had vanished and the start point gave remarkable views over the valley to Ottery.

An easy walk down through beautiful farmland brought us to a path in what was obviously once a land-scaped area. The stroll through an avenue of maples in full Autumn colours with blue sky and sun was magical. We made a short detour to see Knightstone Manor, where Lady Jane Grey had once lived. It's now beautifully maintained by the Osterlund family, and the history of the Manor and photographs of the interior can be seen on their website at <http://www.osterlund.co.uk/knightstonemanor.html>.

Nearing the River Otter we had to cross a field where winter wheat was struggling to survive after the inundation and another field closer to the river where there was no hope for the wheat crop, such was the amount of water in that area. Near Ottery one of the group slipped on a muddy bank injuring a leg. Fortunately we were near the road and a Social Services Office. They provided a good Samaritan who was going to Exeter and dropped Trish off at A&E.

Unfortunately a break in the leg was diagnosed.

After a picnic lunch on the west bank of the Otter, we continued through meadows, grasses flattened and muddy with fences ripped out and fences further away swathed with detritus. It was easy walking but terrifying to imagine the force of water through there less than a week earlier. On through Tipton St John and an easy climb ending in beautiful woods to stroll back to the car park made it a great walk. Once again Mike and Suzanne had excelled themselves! Thanks, Mike – it might have been eight miles but this was one of your easier walks!

Ruth

P.S. Mike had told us that this was part of a walk around Sidmouth he had helped set up 20 years ago. An annual event known as the Sidmouth Saunter has varying lengths of 13, 17 and 25 miles, which this year had 250 participants, including 102 from local schools, introducing young people to the pleasure of walking in the countryside and as a preliminary to Ten Tors training. If anyone is interested in walking one of the routes themselves, full route descriptions are available on the web page <http://beehive.thisisexeter.co.uk/default.asp?WCI=SiteHome&ID=8817&PageID=102607>

Tea at Topsham, 20th November

Heartened by the prospect of afternoon tea at Topsham, twenty turned up on a fine day for the preliminary stroll. Fearing that we might have a few defectors if we went too close to the tea-rooms area, we crossed the railway and headed out of town towards the M5, then up a cul-de-sac which led us to the University Cricket Ground. This was a first visit for most so we admired the pavilion and pictured the summer scene (wet and noisy?).

We then joined the river at the Retreat Boatyard where fortunately the first 20 metres of path (covered at high tide) was exposed as the tide was going out. It was a pleasant stroll along the river with interesting local anecdotes from the native DB (many thanks). This included the fact that the 'Goat Walk' got its name because, on seeing the then newly constructed path, one of the locals muttered that it wasn't wide enough to walk a goat.

Finally we were back at Holman Way via Bowling Green Marsh. At last the pace quickened as Mary Ravenhill scorched along leading the way to the Georgian Tea Room where half (allegedly) cream teas were very popular.

Trevor

Hunter's Path, 1st December

The end-of-year walk (on Dec 1st) took place on a stunning winter morning with blue sky and bright sun. The outward route along the Teign valley was in shadow but the frost on the trees created some magical effects and the photographers were well pleased not to say ecstatic. The group (29 – a record) divided at the bridge below Castle Drogo with a third returning along the other side of the river. The rest climbed to the Hunter's Path to be greeted by some fantastic sunshine views (cue the ecstatic photographers). We all crowded hurriedly into the Fingle Bridge Inn for lunch early enough date-wise to avoid the Christmas bonhomie and early enough time-wise to miss the promised 'Wake' for 150 people!

Thanks to John Boyle for a great walk and a great ending to the year.

Trevor

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