



OTTER VALLEY ASSOCIATION

Volume 37/1

January 2016

www.ova.org.uk

PO Box 70 Budleigh Salterton EX96WN

Registered Charity No: 278266 © Otter Valley Association

Winter
Newsletter

Autumn Picture Gallery



One of our Otter Valley beavers – photo courtesy of Dave White.
See report on pg 11



There's always one! – 31st Oct

Good news about the future of Bystock Pools – see pg 6



Railway viaduct near Uplyme – 13th Nov



Lunch at Lamberts Castle – 16th Oct

Cover photo courtesy of Mo Sandford

From the Editor

A Happy New Year to all OVA members. For those of you who over-indulged during the festive season and have resolved to get fitter/slimmer please check out the Walks Programme which starts on Page 19. For non-walkers, I hope the programme (and this issue of the newsletter) also contains some items of interest.

Recently, I had the pleasure of meeting Dr Anita Jennings, a founder member of the OVA and the first newsletter 'editor'. Dr Jennings kindly gave me some background to the formation and history of the Association and allowed me access to an extensive archive of material, dating from its formation in 1979. On page 14 there is an article derived from the press archive which may be of interest to those (like me) who are new to the OVA, or are unfamiliar with its history.

Jacqui Baldwin

Woodland Management in the Lower Otter Valley; Threats and Opportunities

A walk with John Wilding MBE, Head of Forestry and Environmental Economy at Clinton Devon Estates on Monday, 25 April 2016

We have been invited by Clinton Devon Estates, to visit Harpford Wood for a walk with commentary from Head of Forestry John Wilding MBE. We will learn about their stewardship and approach to sustainable forestry and some of the challenges facing managers of the woodland environment. There will be opportunity for discussion. The tour will begin at 6pm from the reservoir at the southern edge of the wood. The walk will be gentle paced on good tracks although there is one steeper section.

There is plenty of space for car parking. Take the forest track parallel to the road to the Farm Shop on Four Elms Hill A3052 approximately 1km east of Newton Poppleford. The tour will include a hot drink and the cost is £5 per person. The tour will go ahead rain or shine.

Please complete the form overleaf and return to Roger Saunders, together with a cheque payable to OVA and a stamped, self-addressed envelope. As there is limited space on this visit, you will receive confirmation after 28 Feb.

Tree clearance adjacent to the River Otter Estuary

Western Power have requested Clinton Devon Estates to take down some trees that have been planted at the site of the old dump just west of White Bridge. These are endangering power lines crossing the Estuary at this point. Removing the trees adjacent to the overhead cables will leave a narrow strip on the edge of the site, which will then be vulnerable to wind blow. Removal of trees at the edge of a plantation increases exposure to the wind which can also cause further problems including soil erosion as tree roots are ripped up from the ground as a large plate. Therefore the decision has been taken to remove all the conifers and poplars from the site whilst retaining the broad leaved species to the southern edge.

Removing the trees at this time takes away the risk of trees coming down in future high winds and will also facilitate future management of invasive species such as Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed at this site. The site will not be replanted with a commercial crop, but left to return to native broadleaved trees and shrubs enhancing the conservation status of the area.



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Guided Woodland Tour in Harpford Wood 6pm on 25th April 2016

Please send me tickets

Name(s)

Address

..... Postcode

Tel: email

I enclose a cheque for £..... (£5.00 per person) payable to the OVA and a
Stamped Self-Addressed Envelope

Send ticket application for **Guided Woodland Tour to:**
Roger Saunders, Roundhill, 11 Knowle Road, Budleigh Salterton EX9 6AS

Chairman's Report

At the beginning of the year it is always a temptation either to review the last year or make predictions for the future. I am going to do a little of both.

Looking backwards, in the last newsletter I wrote about the potential crisis at the OVA due to a lack of volunteers to fill the essential positions in the organisation. My headline also caught the eye of the *Budleigh Journal*, who ran a front page article about it. Following the publicity we did get approached by a few people interested in volunteering, and now have two additional volunteers helping us out. This doesn't mean that there isn't a need for more volunteers, we still need a Talks organiser, an Hon. Secretary and village representatives for Otterton and Colaton Raleigh. Please get in touch if you are interested.

Now for looking forward – I think that 2016 is likely to see some interesting changes in the Otter Valley. There is a possibility that East Devon District Council's Local Plan could finally get approved. At the moment it has gaps, especially in the area of compliance with legal requirements about providing alternate recreational areas for developments close to the Pebblebed Heaths – so approval is not certain. But, if it is approved, we should see better regulated planning, instead of "anything goes".

In addition Neighbourhood Plans for East Budleigh, Budleigh Salterton and Newton Poppleford are moving forward. Over 900 people have responded to the Budleigh Salterton residents' questionnaire, and 294 to East Budleigh (about 50% of the population). The results of these questionnaires will drive the development of policies in planning, traffic and transport, shopping and business and recreation. If the plans work as advertised, they should give local people a stronger voice in how the Otter Valley develops over the next 20 years.

The Otter estuary is another area set for change. We have written about the Lower Otter Valley Restoration Project in previous newsletters. The aim of the project is to return the Lower Otter to its natural flood plain by breaching the embankments that currently constrain the river. Even without action this is likely to happen in the future due to rising sea levels and the higher frequency of storms that now occur. Not all local residents are in favour of the scheme at the moment, but as funding options become clearer in the next twelve months a more detailed plan should emerge.

While it may seem an unlikely choice, as a World Heritage site, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Site of Special Scientific Interest, the Otter Mouth is also a lead candidate for the landfall of a high capacity electricity cable linking Britain with France via Alderney. The cable would have a capacity of 1400 MW, which is equivalent to about half of the expected output of Hinkley Point C nuclear power station. The cable would join the National Grid near Exeter and give additional flexibility to meeting the UK's power requirements. How the cable gets from Budleigh Salterton to Exeter has not been decided yet, but it is likely to come ashore via a conduit drilled underneath Lime Kiln car park and Budleigh beach. Construction is not scheduled to start until 2018, but preliminary survey work is already underway, with exploratory drilling under the car park in December 2015. If you want to learn more about the project you can visit the FAB project website www.fablink.net visit our Facebook page www.facebook.com/OtterValleyAssoc or come to our AGM in May where a project manager from FAB will be giving us a talk.

Finally, on behalf of the OVA Executive Committee, I wish you all the best for 2016.

Roger Saunders

Bystock's Future Almost Secured

Bystock Pools is one of Devon's most loved wild places. Devon Wildlife Trust has leased the site for 39 years, transforming it into a flourishing nature reserve enjoyed by thousands of local people and visitors every year. Bystock has 67 acres of flower-filled meadows, mature woodland, colourful heathland and ponds galore and is home to a dazzling variety of butterflies including rare species such as the silver-studded blue. The ponds provide a home for flourishing populations of dragonflies and damselflies. Bystock is a haven for bats and dormice – it's also one of the best places in Devon to spot the magical illuminations of glow worms. There was, therefore, great concern when in early 2015 it was learned that the current landowner intended to sell Bystock.

However, thanks to the generosity of members and other donors and supporters responding to their appeal Devon Wildlife Trust has now raised the majority of the money needed to finalise the purchase of Bystock. At the time of writing just £5,900 remains to be raised by the 31 March 2016 deadline. If donations exceed purchase costs the Trust will use any remaining funds to look after Bystock's wildlife and to make the site even more enjoyable for visitors.



River Otter SSSI

The River Otter Estuary, along with the cliffs of Otterton Point, is designated a site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This key conservation site of 33 hectares is managed by the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust. The primary reason for its SSSI designation is that the estuary contains a wide range of saltmarsh and reed beds which together support high numbers of breeding and overwintering bird species. Reed bed is a very rare habitat nationally, and because of the hilly landscape, large areas are not common in Devon.

The River Otter is an important site for birds and, although dwarfed by the Exe and the Axe, 125 species have been recorded with a number of particular conservation interest including the whimbrel and black-tailed godwit. A juvenile Cetti's warbler was ringed there early this year. Over the winter the reeds provide roosting for starlings, pied wagtails and long-tailed tits.

In early October the Trust undertook reed bed management on the site to ensure a diversity of age structure to maintain the best habitat for birds such as reed and sedge warblers, reed buntings and water rail. Reed beds can benefit from being cut periodically to stop the build-up of dead organic matter at the base of the reeds which can lead to invasion by scrub. Ideally work needs to be done every 5-8 years depending on regrowth. You may have seen two sites, one below and one above White Bridge, which have been cleared of reeds and the material burned.

Fly-tipping

Something that does seem to be on the increase recently is fly-tipping. In addition to being an SSSI the Pebblebed Heaths are designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC). As well as being highly anti-social, fly-tipping undermines the special nature of this European conservation site.

The Trust takes fly tipping very seriously and will seek to prosecute anyone found guilty of dumping rubbish. Clearing up is a huge waste of resources, taking staff away from important conservation management and education work. Local people have been equally annoyed about this activity prompting some to make posts on social media. Whilst this has been useful and has helped to identify

offenders, the Trust would also encourage people to contact them directly allowing all evidence to be passed on to the police.

Volunteering Opportunities on the Pebblebed Heaths

Learn new skills and help with the conservation of this special place by joining our volunteers to help with winter scrub work, habitat creation and boardwalk maintenance. Work is suitable for all abilities. Gloves and tools provided but please bring lunch, and wear old clothes and stout footwear. Volunteers meet fortnightly on Wednesdays and work from 9.30am till early afternoon, if you want to stay that long, with plenty of tea breaks to soak up the beautiful surroundings.

Future work party dates:

Wednesday 20 Jan - Model Airfield car park then fortnightly 3 Feb, 17 Feb, 2 March, 16 March, 30 March 13 April with venues tbc. For more details please contact Countryside Learning Officer, Kate Ponting, on 01395 446 918 - kate.ponting@clintondevon.co.uk

The Spring Litter Pick (FOR YOUR DIARIES!)

The date for the 2016 Annual Spring Litter-Pick is **Saturday 19th March**.

Each year we run this in conjunction with East Devon District Council and Clinton Devon Estates. As usual, we will assemble for a 10am start in the Limekiln Car Park in Budleigh Salterton. Free parking tickets will be distributed together with plastic bags and tongs.



The plan again is to collect litter for two hours and prizes for the most interesting finds will be made just after 12noon. Wellington boots and gloves are essential; waterproofs may well be necessary. All volunteers are most welcome!

Last year's prizewinner

England Coast Path – improving public access to the coast

Work is well underway on the England Coast Path - a new National Trail around England's coast. For the first time people will have the right of access around all our open coast. This includes – where appropriate – any land, other than the trail itself, which forms part of the coastal margin and which has public rights of access along the way. This is known as 'spreading room'.

As part of this plan, Natural England has begun to investigate how to improve coastal access along a 109 km stretch of the South West Coast Path between Kingswear and Lyme Regis. This new access is expected to be ready in 2018.

Officers from Devon County Council and Torbay Council are providing Natural England with expert local advice and helping to make sure there is full consultation with local interests during the development of the route. The South West Coast Path Association have welcomed the plans including implementation of new legislation that will formalise the public's right to access most beaches and headlands. Any route changes will be in locations where the SWCP is currently routed away from the coast but where there are seaward fields, woods or coastal slopes that would provide a better walking experience. Landowners will also benefit from reduced liability for any accidents that may occur.

Behind the Scenes at The Donkey Sanctuary

A guided tour on Tuesday 15th March 2016 starting at 10.00am

This is your chance to tour The Donkey Sanctuary (Slade House Farm, Sidmouth, EX10 0NU). Meet at The Donkey Sanctuary Events Barn and start with a cup of coffee or tea, then walk around the Sanctuary accompanied by staff members, visiting both the main public areas and behind the scenes at Trow Farm. Learn about what the Sanctuary does, and also their work in wildlife conservation on the sites. Finish up in the Hayloft Restaurant where you can buy lunch. There is plenty of space for car parking. The tour will take about three hours, and the cost is £5 per person. The visit will go ahead rain or shine.

As there is limited space on this visit, applications for the tour will be opened randomly on the 1st February, 2016. Please complete the form overleaf and return to Roger Saunders, together with a cheque payable to OVA and a stamped self-addressed envelope.

15 new walking routes in East Devon



The East Devon AONB team in conjunction with East Devon Ramblers and EDDC's Countryside Team have recently launched 15 new circular walking routes leading off the East Devon Way.

A map of walks, which range from 3 miles to 8.1 miles in length, can be downloaded from the website www.eastdevonaonb.org.uk.



Behind the Scenes at the Donkey Sanctuary
10.00am, Tuesday 15th March 2016

Please send me tickets

Name(s)

Address

..... Postcode

Tel: email

I enclose a cheque for £..... (£5.00 per person) payable to the OVA and a **Stamped Self-Addressed Envelope**

Send ticket application for **Donkey Sanctuary Tour to:**
Roger Saunders, Roundhill, 11 Knowle Road, Budleigh Salterton EX9 6AS

Beavers on the Otter

The level of local interest in the River Otter Beaver Trial was evidenced by the numbers who turned out on a cold November night to listen to a presentation by Mark Elliott, the 'Devon Beaver Project Lead', of the Devon Wildlife Trust. Mark began by confirming that, despite recent newspaper and TV reports to the contrary, the beavers had not 'disappeared' from the Otter. Although they had not been seen for a period over the summer (and even the experts don't know where they have been!) there is evidence that they are very much alive and well.

The talk was fascinating, taking us from the first recorded sightings in 2007 to the discovery in early 2014 that beavers were breeding on the River Otter. Following a campaign, Devon Wildlife Trust, on behalf of the River Otter Beaver Trial, was granted a licence by Natural England to re-release beavers back into the river for a 5 year trial. With the licence in place, five beavers were captured by the Animal and Plant Health Agency in February 2015, and a detailed health screening was carried out by specialist vets from Royal Zoological Society for Scotland - a process which you may have seen covered by the BBC's 'Countryfile' programme. All the beavers were shown to be healthy Eurasian beavers, the two adult females were confirmed as pregnant, and they were returned to the Otter in late March 2015.

Mark explained that the objectives of the trial are to:

- Understand the ecology, behaviour and population dynamics of a beaver population in a lowland, productive agricultural landscape
- Identify and assess impacts of beavers on habitats, wildlife, built infrastructure and local communities
- Identify wider public benefits associated with beaver activity in the landscape
- Increase knowledge and awareness with local communities and other key stakeholders of beavers and their interactions in the landscape
- Develop an effective management process for a free-living beaver population
- Provide data and evidence to augment the national knowledge base on beaver re-introduction

Conditions attached to the licence include that the beavers must remain in the Otter catchment, and that a fully funded exit strategy must be in place to remove the animals should their impact on the area be deemed unacceptable.

As part of his presentation Mark showed the results of a research project being carried out by DWT on the impacts of beavers in a 3ha enclosure in West Devon. Over the past four years, up to five beavers have manipulated their environment, creating 13 ponds with a surface area in excess of 1000m². Annual frogspawn counts have shown an exponential increase, and a survey of aquatic water beetles has shown numbers rise from 8 species in 2011 to 26 in 2015. The hydrological and water quality impacts have been the subject of research by the University of Exeter revealing very significant changes to the flood hydrograph and improvements in water quality between the upstream and downstream monitoring stations.

Of the two family groups on the Otter, one is located in the Ottery St Mary area and the other further downstream around Otterton/White Bridge although, due to their low density, the beavers are very mobile and have been sighted along the whole 30 mile length of the river. It was noted that, due to the quantity of safe, deep water habitat available, the Otter beaver population is not currently dam-building and there has been very little evidence of environment manipulation to date. Mark explained that the beavers have an inbuilt urge to build dams. The presence of deep water in the ponds which they create gives them a sense of security and they are programmed to stop any sound of running water by sealing the dam. To prevent upstream flooding on the West Devon site the Trust has installed 'beaver deceivers'. These are lengths of pipe which begin and end underwater to prevent the sound that triggers this urge. One very positive aspect of their presence on the Otter is that the beavers eat Himalayan Balsam although we were warned not to get too exuberant as, in such low density, the beavers would have a very limited effect.

In response to questions from the very engaged audience, Mark stated that the origin of the beavers is unknown and with no evidence to link them to any particular local captive group. However, DNA testing has shown them all to be closely related and, therefore, if the beavers remain on the Otter it may be necessary to introduce unrelated animals to ensure that the gene pool is not compromised. When asked whether the beavers could be aggressive, Mark said that generally they are not. However, beavers are large animals (sometimes in excess of 20kgs) and like most animals they would likely defend their young if threatened by dogs or other potential predators. It is important that walkers keep to footpaths and dogs are kept under control.

Finally, Mark asked for beaver sightings to be sent to the Devon Wildlife Trust via the email beavers@devonwildlifetrust.org or by telephone stating time, location and colour of any ear-tags.

The event, which was hosted jointly by the OVA and Otterton Garden Club at Otterton Village Hall, attracted over 100 attendees. The OVA has made a donation of £50 to support the Beaver Trial.

Bathing Water Quality

Further to the report about bathing water quality in the Autumn newsletter DEFRA has announced that a total of 97% of England's bathing waters passed the minimum tougher EU standard this year. In total, 63.6% of bathing waters have been classified as Excellent with Seaton, Beer, Jacob's Ladder and Sandy Bay all meeting this standard and Budleigh Salterton and Sidmouth classified as 'Good'.

Dr Pete Fox, Director of Land & Water at the Environment Agency said:
"Water quality at beaches is better than any time in living memory, with dramatic improvements having been made over the last few decades. The Environment Agency has led successful work to monitor, investigate and reduce pollution, which has benefited the environment and people, with nearly all of England's beaches meeting the new stringent water quality standards."

The EA monitors the quality of bathing waters and carries out regular testing and inspections. They also work with local partners to identify pollution sources and take action to protect and improve bathing water quality across the country. Actions to improve bathing water locally include:

- To tackle pollution caused by bird droppings at Teignmouth Town Beach, anti-bird roosting measures were installed on Teignmouth Pier to discourage birds using the area under the main pier buildings for roosting and nesting. The result has been a dramatic improvement in bathing water quality.
- In Budleigh Salterton and Seaton fencing off nearby streams and farming campaigns have helped to reduce effluent from livestock running into waters.

If you see significant pollution in the Otter river please contact the EA. (tel. 0800 80 70 60) so they can investigate.

A dip into the OVA Archives

The OVA was formed as a 'Civic Society' under the auspices of the then Civic Trust (now replaced by Civic Voice). What is a Civic Society? The civic movement is based on a network of hundreds of local voluntary civic and amenity societies in the warp and weft of communities across England. It is one of the largest social movements in the country. The first civic society was set up in the 1840's.

Civic societies provide a focus for voluntary and community action to improve the places where people live and work. They champion the importance of these places to decision makers in business, politics, government, the media and elsewhere. They play an essential role in helping individuals and communities to understand and take action to improve the quality of their life through the place where they live. Civic societies promote and celebrate the best of what is inherited from the past and what is developed for the future. This brings benefits to the whole community and not just to those who are members.

At the time, civic societies already existed in Exmouth, Ottery St. Mary and the Sid Vale – and the OVA was formed to 'fill the gap' and cover Budleigh Salterton, the parishes of East Budleigh and Bicton, Otterton, Colaton Raleigh and Newton Popleford. A 10-member steering committee was formed in March 1979 and the first Open Meeting took place on 9th April in the public hall at Budleigh Salterton which was attended by over 120 people. Mr Charles Snow was elected the first Chairman and the annual subscription for adults was set at £1.00!

By August, the Association had over 200 members and six sub-committees proposed: planning, footpaths, local history & archaeology, nature study, pollution, publicity and programme. In that year the OVA was granted charitable status by the Charity Commissioners and was registered with the Civic Trust.

The first 'talk' – "Artist in Landscape - The Otter Valley" – was given by local artist Alan Cotton on 7th September and was attended by over 100 people. Alan went on to provide illustrations for the OVA newsletters. The first 'walk' took place on 26th September and 35 people – and three dogs – walked 5 miles from Colaton Raleigh to Hawkerland and back. In October, 90 members of the Association attended a talk by local natural historian Trevor Bartlett who, along with other useful information, explained how to sex a badger! By January 1980 membership had increased to 300 and the walks had proved so popular - a 'record' 44 participating in the January walk – that the number was doubled to two per

month. According to the Sidmouth Herald of Saturday 19th January the “the SVA’s infant sister” had grown up.

It would appear that some things never change - the first spring clean of the Otter Estuary which took place in April 1980 resulted in 120 cubic feet of rubbish being collected which comprised “mainly plastic offal but also contained a water cistern, the outer housing of a washing machine, several car tyres, a 70lb lump of tar (raised by means of a tow-rope fixed to a mini!) plus a pair of shoes”.

The weather does not seem to have changed much either with newspaper reports throughout 1980/81 of “Windblown walkers”; “They walked despite everything”; “March winds hit walkers”; “Rain kept away all but the bravest”; “They walked in sunshine before the storms struck” and, saddest of all, “Rained off”.

Planning matters were also high on the agenda in the early years with the OVA commenting on many planning proposals including the erection of a Church Hall in the grounds of St Peter’s Church, Budleigh Salterton, the proposal to build 72 houses on a 12-acre site in the centre of Newton Poppleford and the development of an open-air car sales area in High Street, Budleigh Salterton. In May 1982 it was noted that the OVA had been invited to comment on the new draft Local Plan for the area – 33 years later we are doing the same thing.

My personal favourite from the archive comes from December 1980 and a report of the second annual Social Evening. The party, held in East Budleigh Village Hall, was attended by more than 90 members and first prize in the raffle was 4lb of sirloin with half a cwt of local potatoes the second prize! It would seem that OVA members at the time were a talented bunch entertaining one another with songs, monologues, poetry and piano-playing. I wonder what hidden stars there are within the current membership? – perhaps there is an opportunity for an evening entitled “The OVA’s Got Talent”?

The third AGM held in May 1982 reported a membership of 527 and a thriving programme of ‘walks and talks’ – a fantastic achievement in such a short period of time. Those of us who are now enjoying the benefits of our membership of the OVA are very grateful to those early ‘pioneers’ for their foresight and tremendous hard work. Let us hope that the current membership is prepared to work just as hard to ensure that the OVA is still here in another 36 years.

Editor

Himalayan Balsam 2015

The Otter Valley Invasive Species Project remained on hold because of cuts, so action in the catchment was restricted to: the long-running Tale Valley work at Escot House (since 2005), smaller efforts at Otterhead and Tipton St John, and our continuing work, in conjunction with Clinton Devon Estates (CDE, in the lower valley). There was no coordinated work in the upper catchment. Our general aim, with CDE, is to achieve and maintain control of all the tributaries in this lower region. The OVA's particular target in 2015 was to consolidate our control of the Colaton Raleigh Brook, while the Newton Poppleford team attempted to do likewise on the lower Back Brook with Rob Jones continuing his sterling work upstream in Hawkerland. CDE meanwhile took over from the East Budleigh team on their brook and attacked sundry outbreaks on the Pebblebed Heaths. After a recce with CDE we agreed to join them on the Opening Day (19th June) at Goosemoor, a problematic area just above Newton Poppleford. Partly because of this we did not repeat the 2014 PR exercise on the Otter footpath, needing urgently to tackle our home patch (i.e Colaton brook) before the flowering season.

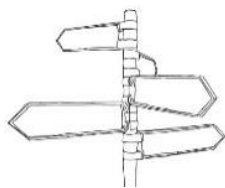
Volunteers: The number of volunteers in 2015, at 19, although above the levels of 2012 (14) and 2013 (16) was significantly less than last year's record 27. Obviously this was disappointing and I do appeal again to members. If you enjoy fresh air and want to do something environmentally useful, please get in touch. We go out each Thursday and Saturday mornings and even a single outing is valued. No long-term commitment is required!

Achievements: In 2014 our target had been to complete three sweeps down the Colaton Brook from Stowford to the flood plain and we nearly made it. This year we managed it, completing the three full sweeps on 23rd July, 20th August and the 13th October respectively. To do better than in 2014 with a smaller squad was an excellent achievement, especially as it seemed to be a particularly good year for balsam growth. At least three new hotspots appeared and Stowford swamp continued to require a great deal of effort. But against that, most of Stowford Woods is now completely clear as also are long stretches of riverbank both above and below Colaton Raleigh village. Well done the team!

(A full report will appear on our website as usual)

Patrick Hamilton, Acting Chairman, Natural Environment Committee

A Walk for Everyone - Winter Programme 2016



It has been a pleasure to welcome so many members to the OVA's walks over the past year, whether you join us every week or disappear for months before returning! We certainly take our walking seriously for its mental and physical benefits, but we try not to forget that OVA walks are a very sociable affair.

For example, Mike not only chose to walk on his birthday but marked the occasion by providing us all with cakes to accompany our coffee, a precedent continued by Stella, and Chris with the help of Dee's seasonal mulled wine! So, if you are walking with us in the same month as your birthday falls, you know what you have to do! (Passports will be checked!)

As usual, there will be plenty of opportunity to eat cake on the variety of walks planned for our own Otter Valley and East Devon during the winter months. We shall also push the boundaries to visit Trinity Nature Reserve and Farway, as well as renew our acquaintance with the Exe Valley Way en route to Newton St Cyres.

Following our successful venture to Lambert's Castle in Dorset, we will again cross the border to climb another Iron Age Hill Fort: Pilsdon Pen, which at 275 metres claims to be the highest point in the county, although disputed by Leweston at 2 metres higher. We will keep them both happy! Then to Dartmoor to welcome Spring and enjoy the daffodils between Clifford and Steps Bridge.

For you 'trail blazers', we will be tackling the 117 mile Devon Coast to Coast route between Wembury in the south and Lynmouth in the north, as described below. We shall also be repeating last year's enjoyable completion of the 18 mile Templar Way from Haytor on Dartmoor to Teignmouth, in two 'easy' stages.

Given the advanced notice this Newsletter provides, it is a good idea to check the website (and read the Walk Reports not included in this newsletter while you are there!) for any late and unavoidable alterations to the walks schedule and travel arrangements.

The Devon Coast to Coast route description

The Devon Coast to Coast (C2C) long distance trail runs between Wembury on the South Devon Coast to Lynmouth on the North Devon Coast, passing through two National Parks. This 117 mile route crosses a variety of terrain, encompassing stretches of remote open moor, steep hills, deep wooded river valleys, green lanes, paths and minor roads. As well as panoramic views, there is invariably interest provided by ancient waymarks, historic remains, commemorative stones, antiquities, bridges, inns, farm buildings and 'post-card' cottages.

If you have ever walked on Dartmoor or Exmoor (such as our recently completed Exe Valley Way), then you will probably have sampled sections of this iconic route, which opened in 1976 as the Two Moors Way, before combining with the Erme-Plymouth Trail that links Ivybridge to the South Coast, to form the C2C in 2005.

Unfortunately, we have decided that, where public transport exists, it is too problematical to rely on, so we will be meeting at Newton Poppleford to share cars for the journey to the start of each section, and leaving some cars at the finish, before the walk commences.

Normally, we expect our walks to have been 'tested on the ground', but on these occasions, although we may be able to reconnoitre some sections, we invite you to join us for an 'adventure'. Of course we shall plan each route carefully using the OS Map, and seek advice from two excellent Guidebooks: ("Two Moors Way: Devon's Coast to Coast" by Devon County Council. ISBN 1 85522 966 8. £4.99 from Budleigh Salterton Information Centre; "The Two Moors Way: Devon's Coast to Coast", by Sue Viccars, pub. Cicerone 2015, ISBN 978 1 85284 714 2. £12.95 from Cotswold Outdoor) but on occasions, we may all be finding our way together!

We have divided the route into 12 stages, but if you are not free to complete the whole walk, please join us when you are able.

We look forward to seeing you soon and hope you will have a Happy Walking New Year!

Chris and Mike



Events Programme – January to April 2016

Saturday 9th January, 10.00am. WALK

Start: Knowle Village Hall CP (OS Explorer 115, SY 052 827), 5 miles, 2.5 hours.

“Walk in the New Year”

A circular undulating walk over the commons to Bystock Fishponds with varied topography including woodland and heathland. May be muddy. Optional lunch at the Britannia Inn – if open!

Walk leader: Steve Hagger, 01395 442631

Wednesday 13th January, 10.00am WALK

Start at Trinity Hill CP (OS Explorer 116, SY 304 955), 7.5 miles.

“A castle view”

Route via Woodhouse Hill, East Devon Way, Musbury (panoramic views of the Axe Valley from the castle), and Great Trill. Please bring a picnic.

Walk leader: Ted Swan 01395 567450

Tuesday 19th January, 7.30pm - TALK

‘Dartmoor Towns & Villages’ - Knowle Village Hall

Paul Rendell looks at the history and lifestyles within some of the villages and towns on the Moor. Places include Princetown and Sheepstor.

Contact: Trevor Waddington 443978

Wednesday 20th January, 10.00am. WALK

Start: Kersbrook (under railway bridge), (OS Explorer SY 069 830), 7 miles, 3 hours.

“Byways and Boundaries”

A devious figure of eight route along the alleyways and byways of Budleigh and its boundaries, including part of the old railway track and some of the coast path between Budleigh and West Down Beacon.

Walk leader: Chris Buckland 01395 444471

Wednesday 27th January , 9:30am - WALK

Start at The Otter Inn, Colaton Raleigh (OS Explorer 115, SY 0778 8734), 8 miles, 4 hours.

“Pop goes the Weasel”

Bus 157 from Budleigh Salterton Public Hall (08:58) to Colaton Raleigh (09:20) for 9:30am start. Car parking at the Otter Inn.

This walk circumnavigates Newton Poppleford on river banks, footpaths, green

lanes and quiet roads. We start out northwards along the River Otter to join the East Devon Way at Harpford Bridge. Then we climb gradually to Joney's Cross before descending to Stoneyford, along Naps Lane with rapidly increasing anticipation of a warming drink and/or lunch at the Otter Inn. No steep slopes, rough ground or steps.

Walk Leader: Jon Roseway, 01395 488 739/ 07887 936 280

Saturday 30th January, 10.15am - WALK

Start at Stoke Cannon (OS Explorer 114, SX 9384 9793), 6 miles, 3 hours. Meet at Exeter Bus Station at 9.45am. Outward via bus 55, dep. Exeter Bus Station 10:00am, arr. Stoke Cannon 10.11am.

“Two Rivers Way”

Walk north from the village along the Exe Valley Way to Burrow Farm from where we head west along the banks of the River Exe to Bramford Speke. We then head further west along the Devonshire Heartland Way, crossing several tributaries of the Rive Exe, to Upton Pyne. From this point we head downhill to the River Creedy whose banks we follow all the way to Newton St Cyres and lunch at the famous Beer Engine PH. After lunch a short walk takes us to the A377 where buses run to Exeter every 15 minutes (***please check OVA website nearer the time for latest bust timetable***).

Walk Leader: Mike Paddison, 01395 446 550

Wednesday 3rd February, 10:00am - WALK

Meet at Newton Poppleford Recreation Ground (OS Explorer 115, SY 088 899) at 8.30am to share cars.

“Coast to Coast Stage 1”

Start: Wembury Beach. (OS Map Explorer OL 20 SX 517 485), 7.5 miles.

Finish: Yealmpton, crossroads on the A379 in village centre (OS Explorer OL 20, SX 579 518)

Rolling fields and wooded valleys. Please bring appropriate food and drink.

Walk Leaders: Mike Paddison, 01395 446 550 Chris Buckland, 01395 444 471

Wednesday 10th February, 10:00am - WALK

Start at the Four Firs car park (OS Explorer 115, SY 032 864), 5.5 miles, 2.5 hours.

“All things Woodbury”

A circular walk visiting Woodbury Castle then turning west to Woodbury and returning via the golf course. Includes tracks, paths and some wooded areas.

Walk Leader: Graham Knapton, 01395 445 872

Monday, 15th February, 7.30pm - TALK

'The role of a Public Rights of Way Warden' - Peter Hall, Budleigh Salterton

Day-to-day proactive management of the rights of way network is the responsibility of the local Public Rights of Way Warden. The Wardens work to ensure that the Highway Authority and landowners are maintaining access along public rights of way to the proper standards. Richard Spurway, the Warden for Devon County Council, will talk about his role.

Contact: Graham Knapton 445872

Wednesday 17th February, 11:30am – WALK

“Templer Way Stage 1”

The Templer Way follows, as closely as possible, the historical export route of granite from the Haytor Quarries to the sea port at Teignmouth. It is 18miles (29km) long and winds through a wide range of scenery from open moorland to estuary foreshore. The walk is 'nearly' downhill all the way! Please bring a picnic lunch.

The first stage is 9 miles between Haytor Information Centre (OS Explorer OL28 & 110, SY 766 772) and Stover School on the A382 where we will catch the 39 bus back to Exeter.

Travel to the start is by the 39 bus from Exeter Bus Station (Stand No 12), dep 10:30, arr Bovey Tracy 11:14. Where we will collect prearranged taxis to Haytor. Provisional booking has been made at a maximum cost of £5.00 per head. If you intend to come, please make a firm commitment to Mike by Wednesday 10th February 2016. Nearer the time, please see OVA website for the latest bus times.

Walk Leader: Mike Paddison, 01395 446 550

Saturday, 20th February, 10:00am - WALK

Start point- East Budleigh CP ((OS Explorer 115 SY 066 849) on bus route 157
7-8 miles, about 4-5 hours.

“A ramble with temptations”

A hilly start to the walk incorporating fields and tracks on a back route from East Budleigh to Budleigh (perhaps break for an ice cream or a coffee?), a stroll along the beach, then a walk up the Otter to Otterton, looking out for otters, beavers and interesting birdlife before returning by back roads to East Budleigh. Late lunch at the Mill or bring a sandwich to eat along the way.

Walk Leaders: Penny and Paul Kurowski, 01395 742 942 / 07792 619 748

Wednesday 24th February, 10:00am - WALK

Start at Knowle Village Hall CP (OS Explorer 115, SY 052 827), 6 miles, 3 hours

“A winding walk”

The walk winds its way across the commons encompassing Shortwood Common, Hayes Wood, Hayes Barton, the birthplace of Sir Walter Raleigh, and returns via East Budleigh Common and Squabmoor, observing Mark Rolle buildings, WWII remains and signs of Spring.

Walk Leader: Brian Turnbull, 01395 567 339

Wednesday 2nd March, 11:30am – WALK

“Templer Way Stage 2”

The second stage is 9 miles between Stover School on the A382 and Teignmouth via Newton Abbot Quay.

Travel to the start is by the 39 bus from Exeter Bus Station (Stand No 12), dep 10:30, arr Stover School (OS Explorer 110, SX 837 739) at 11:30.

A picnic lunch at Newton Abbot Quay will be followed by tea, or something stronger, at Combe Cellars public house, before catching the Shaldon ferry (50p) across the estuary to New Quay in Teignmouth. Definitely downhill all the way!

Return travel by train dep 16.38/17:20 arr Exmouth 15:51/18:25 respectively and onward to East Devon by bus 57/157 or alight at Exeter Central to catch the 52 bus from the bus station. Please see OVA website for the latest bus times.

Walk Leader: Chris Buckland, 01395 444 471

Saturday 5th March, 10:30am - WALK

Start at Newton Poppleford CP, (OS Explorer 115, SY 088 899) at 9:30am to share cars, approx. 8 miles

“The Pen-ultimate Challenge”

Starting Point is Pilsdon Pen layby, Dorset (OS Map Explorer 116, SY 414 009.) A challenging walk with two steep hills. An Iron Age Hillfort, Pilsdon Pen, once thought to be the highest point in Dorset at 277 metres, has wonderful views on a clear day across the Marshwood Vale, to Golden Cap in the South, the Hardy Monument to the East and the Quantocks and Mendips to the North. *“In a county crammed with wonderful walks, this is without question one of the finest”* (a quote from the Cicerone guide book). The route will include Lewesdon Hill, which is arguably just two metres higher than Pilsdon, and take in parts of the Wessex Ridgeway, the Jubilee Trail and the Monarch's Way. Could be muddy/slippy. Sorry no dogs. Please bring a picnic lunch.

Walk Leaders: Rosemary and David Hatch 01392 444 290 / 07186 128 546

Wednesday 9th March, 10:00am - WALK

Start at the Otter Inn CP, Colaton Raleigh (OS Explorer 115, SY 078 874), 6.5 miles
3 hours.

“Where is the Green in Canterbury Green?”

A flat circular walk mostly on local tracks. Crossing the commons to Canterbury Green and then returning via Stowford. Optional lunch at the Otter Inn.

Walk Leader: Mike Paddison 01395 446 550

Tuesday 15th March 2016, 10.00am - EVENT

Behind the Scenes at The Donkey Sanctuary

See page 9 for full details and Booking Form

Wednesday 16th March, 7.30pm - TALK

‘RNLI’ East Budleigh Village Hall.

The Royal National Lifeboat Institution is the charity that saves lives at sea and provides on call, a 24-hour lifeboat search and rescue service and a seasonal lifeguard service. Brian Cole from Exmouth RNLI will talk about the charities work including details of incidents, both local and national.

Contact: Graham Knapton 445872

Saturday 19th March, 10.00am - EVENT

Annual Spring Litter Pick, Limekiln Car Park, Budleigh Salterton

For full details see page 8.

Saturday 19th March, 10:00am - WALK

Meet at Newton Poppleford Recreation Ground (OS Explorer 115, SY 088 899) at 8.30am to share cars.

“Coast to Coast Stage 2”

Start: Yealmpton, crossroads on the A379 in village centre (OS Explorer OL 20, SX 579 518), 9 miles

Finish: Ivybridge, The Watermark, Erme Court (OS Explorer OL 28, SX 637 562)

Rolling fields, wooded valleys, and riverside paths. Please bring a picnic.

Walk Leaders: Mike Paddison 01395 446 550, Chris Buckland 01395 444 471

Wednesday 30th March, 10:00am - WALK

Start: Clifford Bridge roadside parking (OS Explorer 110/OL28 SX 782 898), 5 miles, 3 hours.

“A Daffodil Walk”

Starting at Clifford Bridge, near Dunsford and walking uphill through Cod Wood to Smallridge Farm and then down to Steps Bridge walking adjacent to Woodcock

Wood . Return is a delightful walk alongside the River Teign through Dunsford Wood. There is a short steep climb. Please bring a picnic. Sorry no dogs.
Walk Leader: Margaret Read, 01392 759 332

Friday 1st to Monday 4th April - West Woolley Walking Weekend

The next OVA walking weekend will be based at West Woolley farm complex, approximately 6 miles north of Bude and 3 miles inland from Marsland Mouth, on the North Cornwall coast. The trip is fully subscribed and will provide four days of challenging walks on this dramatic coast. Further information from the Walk Organisers.

Saturday 9th April, 10:00am - WALK

Start at the Joney's Cross CP (OS Explorer 115, SY 057 898) 5 Miles, 2.5 hours.

“Gently does it”

A gentle walk to Aylesbeare via Randelhayes farm and back via Manor farm and Aylesbeare common.

Walk Leader: Graham Knapton, 01395 445 872

Wednesday 13th April, 10:00am - WALK

Start at East Budleigh Church CP, (OS Explorer 115, SY 065 848). 9 miles, 4.5 hours.

“Coast and Country”

A varied walk giving an ever-changing perspective using the coast path, local roads and tracks. Visiting Ladram Bay, High Peak and Windgate returning inland via Otterton and Bicton. Some hilly sections. Please bring a picnic lunch.

Walk Leader: Mike Paddison, 01395 446 550

Saturday 16th April, 10:00am - WALK

Start at Knapp Copse Nature Reserve CP (OS Explorer 115, SY 155 957) 9.5 miles, 5 hours.

“Knapp Copse to Farway and back”

This walk gives us the opportunity to enjoy springtime in the unspoilt farmland and woods around Farway. There are a few hills to climb (maximum ascent of 100m) but the views of the Holcombe and Coly valleys make it worth the effort. Bringing a packed lunch is recommended, although refreshments are available afterwards at the Hare and Hounds. Anyone who can offer others a lift or needs one should contact the walk leader.

Walk Leader: Jon Roseway 01395 488 739/ 07887 936280

Wednesday 20th April, 10:00am - WALK

Meet at Newton Poppleford Recreation Ground (OS Explorer 115, SY 088 899) at 8.30am to share cars.

“Coast to Coast Stage 3”

Start: Ivybridge, The Watermark, Erme Court (OS Explorer OL 28, SX 637 562), 13.5 miles

Finish: Holne, crossroads in village centre (OS Explorer OL 28, SX 705 695).

Exposed track, pathless moorland, often wet underfoot. Please bring picnic.

Walk Leaders: Mike Paddison (01395 446 550), Chris Buckland (01395 444 471)

Friday 22nd April, 10:00am - WALK

Start at Lower Weston National Trust CP (OS Explorer 115, SY 166 889) 5 miles.

“Uphill and Down Dale”

Walking down Weston Combe to Weston Cliff and along the coast path to Berry Fort, inland to Berry Barton and past Fountain’s Head public house at Street, where lunch can be booked by those who wish to dine after the walk. The walk includes a couple of short steep climbs, and wonderful sea views. Sorry no dogs.

Walk Leader: Margaret Read, 01392 759 332

Monday 25th April, 6.00pm – Harpford Wood - EVENT

Woodland Management in the Lower Otter Valley; Threats and Opportunities

A walk with John Wilding MBE, Head of Forestry and Environmental Economy at Clinton Devon Estates See page 3 for full details and Booking Form

Wednesday 27th April, 10:00am - WALK

Start at Lime Kiln CP (OS Explorer 115 SY 073 820). 10 miles, 6 hours.

“Circumnavigating Budleigh Salterton”

The walk commences along Marine Parade and the South West Coast Path to West Down Beacon and heads inland to Dalditch Farm via Castle Lane. It continues through Hayes Wood and across the common, past Yettington to Colaton Raleigh. After a well-earned break, the return journey follows the riverside path past Otterton to Lime Kiln car park. Please bring a picnic lunch.

Walk Leader: Brian Turnbull, 01395 567 339

Wed 18 May, 7.30 pm - OVA AGM, Masonic Hall, Budleigh Salterton

Hear about the OVA's work in the last year, elect your representatives. Followed by refreshments and a talk on the FAB powerline project by Project Manager Chris Jenner

Walks Reports

Dorset Ridgeway, Coney's Castle and Lambert's Castle – 16th October

As 'webmeister' for the OVA Walk Section, it pains me to see a gap in our table of walk reports for what was a very enjoyable walk. Therefore, in true walker spirit, I pulled out my trusty pen to remedy the situation.

We gathered in the beach car park at Charmouth. The weather was fine and everyone was in good spirits. Promptly at 10:00am we set out to walk North back to the town/village of Charmouth. En route, one member unadvisedly mentioned that today was his birthday. With one uniform voice the group responded with a view that cakes and pastries should be bought for the walkers; that there was a very good bakery in Charmouth and that our route would take us past its front door. One sage commented that this was the way that precedents get set. We crossed the main road in Charmouth, and found the bakery in what appeared to be a converted garage behind the shops in the main parade. The requisite numbers of buns were purchased leaving the 'baker' with the difficult task of explaining the lack of choice to any future customers.

The walk continued north, with the birthday person struggling under the weight of all the extra food and asking how far it was to the first coffee stop. After navigating our way around Wooton Fitzpaine, we continued to northwards on the Liberty Trail, which suddenly, out of nowhere, became the Wessex Ridgeway. At this point, coffee time was called and, much to the relief of the birthday person, Danish, rock cakes and other buns were distributed all around.

We continued along the Ridgeway to Long Lane and hence Coney's castle where we have since discovered that *"Coney's Castle hillfort is a roughly kite/shield shaped univalate Iron Age enclosure of around 5 acres (a little over 2 hectares), probably built in two phases. The main ramparts have an annex of around 1.5 acres (0.6 hectares) tacked onto the Southern end. The defences for all ramparts are strongest on the North, East and Southern sides. 'Coney' is a Medieval word for rabbit – many hillforts acted as warrens in the post-Norman period."*

We took time to admire the view before again heading North, this time to Lambert's Castle where we found a convenient place for lunch.

"Lamberts Castle was built around 2,500 years ago; a prominent ditch and bank still survive near the western entrance. Like Pilsdon Pen, this early Iron Age hillfort

with a single ditch and bank (rampart) also has a rich and varied past. Between 1709 and 1947 an annual fair was held here on the Wednesday before the feast of St John the Baptist on June 24. You can still see the imprint of the fair house and the low banks marking the livestock pens or market stalls. During the 18th century there was also a horse-racing track built as part of the fair. This is still visible today to the southwest of the hillfort straddling the Wessex Ridgeway”.

Following a post-lunch walk up Hawkesmore Hill we commenced our return leg of the walk. Whilst the outward leg was mostly in a straight line going northwards, the return leg was anything but straight. It was varied in terrain, gradient, direction, conditions underfoot and visibility and we were thankful to our leader who had reconnoitred the route some weeks before and displayed a confidence that not all of us felt. But we soon joined up with our outward path and made good time back to Charmouth and finally the beach where one enterprising couple announced that they had brought home made cakes. So, for the second time, we sat down to another feast of tea and cakes that nicely rounded off what was universally agreed as “a fine Dorset walk”. Many thanks to Viv for an enjoyable walk in new territory.

Backmarker

A Walk around Luppit and Visit to the Otter Brewery - 29th October

A thirsty coachload set off for the wilds of the Blackdown Hills, with one querying why we were heading for Honiton, as he thought that we were going to Ottery St Mary. It had been raining in the morning, but had now cleared, leaving a cloudy and grey afternoon. Our spirits lifted when we eventually got to Mathayes Farm, near Luppitt, and saw the gleaming tanks, and sniffed the air.



Fortunately, we had been warned in advance that the afternoon walk would be wet and muddy under foot for at least the first mile as we set off down the valley to cross Hense Moor. So when we entered the quagmire, some of us were very pleased that we had chosen to wear our wellies, as we stepped into mud up to our knees. The first part of the walk was full of incidents, what with three impressive attempts at mud wrestling by Jed, and others almost getting stuck in the mud and losing their boots.

We trudged on through the mud for what felt like several miles until we reached a farm road. At that point the mud wrestler decided to head back to the Brewery for warmth and comfort, along what appeared to be a possible route back. The rest of the group carried on and the going got easier as we eventually reached the small village of Luppitt with some relief because it was starting to get a bit dark. So with renewed energy we walked up the steep road out of the village and onto a track along the ridge, where we were rewarded with excellent views to the south and west towards Dumpdon Hill fort in the fading light. We walked on quickly with Chris promising 'only another mile' as it got darker. Eventually we dropped off the ridge, and some of us got out torches as we headed steeply downhill and onto a road. Surely we were close to the Brewery now? Oh no we weren't! We started to cross fields as it began to drizzle. After another mile or so we were relieved to find ourselves back at the Brewery, where a very welcome pint (or two) was waiting for us.

The Head Brewer took us around the site, explaining the complexities of the brewing processes in detail. The brewery has been going for 25 years, and uses the natural spring water, which is particularly good for the lager that they have recently started brewing. They also have an award winning eco-designed cellar building, where the beer is stored at just the right temperature for most of the year without having to be cooled.

It was a fascinating tour, by the end of which we were again eager to sample the different brews. We tried the amber ale, which was very good, but the Wych ale seemed popular and soon ran out. Fortunately there was Otter Bright a-plenty, and other bitters to try. After a few more pints we merrily climbed back on the waiting coach and promptly fell asleep until arrival at our home destination and stumbling home happily.

Everyone agreed that it was a most enjoyable outing, and we are indebted to Andrew for all the trouble he took in organising it for us.

SO CONGRATULATIONS TO ANDREW BERESFORD - THE MAN WHO CAN ORGANISE
A _____ IN A BREWERY

Dee Woods

A Walk around Branscombe – 31st October

On a gloriously sunny autumnal day 16 walkers met at Branscombe Village Hall, for a figure of eight walk that circled first to the west of Branscombe and then to the east.

We eagerly set off up a nearby road and then onto a footpath that led down to a small stream. Unfortunately the wet weather of the previous few days had resulted in very muddy conditions and this, combined with a steep drop, enabled one of our group to demonstrate just how slippery the slope was. Despite the help of outstretched hands he managed to gracefully slip onto the muddy embankment. Others soon navigated another way round, and we continued with only a few chuckles at the muddy behind that accompanied us for the rest of the walk (*see pic on inside front cover*).

We crossed the river heading up the hill through Hole Coppice and Hole Pits emerging alongside the Fountain Head pub. A wander through the woodlands of Pit Coppice eventually brought us out onto the South West Coast Path near Berry Camp, an Iron Age Hill Fort. There were magnificent views of the beaches and cliffs and these would continue throughout the rest of the walk.

Lunch was at Branscombe Mouth after which a few took the opportunity to head back home, some to ensure they would be able to enjoy the forthcoming Rugby final, or was it to get dressed up for the evening's Halloween party? The remaining twelve walkers set off into the undercliff heading towards Beer making the most of the beautiful surroundings and glorious weather. We skirted below Branscombe East Cliff and Hooken Cliff admiring the rocky outcrops of Greensand and Chalk.



There was a short stop along the way looking back towards a cave in the chalk where a bird of prey, possibly a Peregrine Falcon, was circling and landing in the cliff ledges. We had a quick geology lesson on the various rock formations viewed including the age of the Greensand and Chalk rocks and also noted that the Hooken Undercliff was formed in 1790 after a dramatic landslip.

From this point close to the beach we then climbed up the narrow pathway to the top of the cliffs on South Down Common where there were again magnificent

views backwards to Branscombe and forwards towards Beer, Seaton and beyond. After a short rest to admire the views and recover from the climb we were off again.

We headed towards Beer and then turned back by the caravan park to complete the final leg of the figure of eight over the top of the hill and down into Branscombe Mouth with yet more stunning views in the fading sunshine.

We returned home a little muddy but content in making the most of a sunny day and walking 8 miles. Many thanks to Jon Roseway for organising a stunningly beautiful walk (his first) and arranging such wonderful weather to accompany us.

Stella French

“Indiana Jones and the lost castle” Castle Neroche – 6th November

It had been a very wet week and it was still raining at breakfast time on Friday but an OVA outing beckoned and we had, after all, promised we’d be there since we’d missed last year’s classic walk at Castle Neroche. We arrived early, planning to return home at the allotted start time if no one else had turned up. But the intrepid Leader, Iain Ure, arrived shortly afterwards and then we were put to shame by a couple who had driven all the way there from Reigate in Surrey!

In heavy rain, seven soggy stalwarts set off in an easterly circuit of the earthworks. We strode along a track that marked the outer ramparts of the site and stopped near Castle Farm which afforded tantalising views through the rain clouds. Our spirits rose as the rain eased off and the Autumn colours, in vibrant shades of yellow through to brown and bronze in the trees and beneath our feet, were stunning. A lively pace was adopted and in Middleroom wood, coats were packed away as the rain stopped. The view towards Taunton Vale was uplifting and at Forest Farm we admired the local stonework consisting of Blue Lias and honey-coloured blockwork. However, further challenges arose with the crossing of what must have been just a trickling stream when the route was recently “recce’d” but had now turned into a raging torrent! We stormed across bravely, collecting the odd boot full of water, but were promised a coffee stop to encourage us onward. In a village not named on the map, but proudly christened Curland by a passing local, we sat beneath a tree on a thoughtfully placed bench to assist one walker with a soggy sock who had a blister. The offer of a quick amputation was politely refused and the unworldly would-be-surgeon was informed that the patient’s blackened toes were simply displaying the latest trend in nail varnish!

Passing Curland Equestrian School (confirming the name of the village), we had to “Ford” another stream that also had ambitions to be a river which brought to mind the actor who starred in the Indiana Jones adventures. Now my imagination was really fired, encouraged by the Leader’s tale of a giant who was annoyed with the locals and from his vantage point at Castle Neroche, had thrown four boulders onto the next village. In Staple Fitzpaine we saw the rocks, all neatly aimed to fall in the four corners of the crossroads, to avoid causing any obstruction, so he can’t have been that angry!

Someone who knew that I was an amateur lepidopterist confidently informed me that I would soon see some butterflies. In November? In the rain? Really? At the entrance to the Mount Fancy Farm Reserve, butterflies were in abundance, in beautiful illustrations on the information board. Still, I was fascinated that the reserve boasted the scarce Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary and what appeared to be a jet black butterfly (the Chimney Sweeper) which is actually an uncommon day-flying moth. Definitely worth returning to in the summertime!

Now back in movie character, and feeling more confident, we crossed four more frothing, treacherous watercourses (slight exaggeration here). We passed through Staple Common (Forestry Commission) where a few authentic “mealy-mouthed” Exmoor ponies were grazing. I was told this is the appropriate term to describe the yellow markings around their muzzles and eyes, indicative of a primitive trait called pangaré. Finally we climbed up the 2,600 year old earth ramparts and, suitably bedraggled and plastered in mud, we assembled for an authentic Iron Age group photograph!

A memorable walk with wonderful views and expertly planned. Please include in next year’s programme.

David Hatch

“Flirting with Dorset” - Trinity Hill & Uplyme – 13th November

Friday the 13th, not an auspicious day, but the forecast was for sunshine and showers, so a good reason to set off for a walk after all the moist greyness of recent weeks. Nine people met up at the Trinity Hill Nature Reserve car park, and our leader promised us a muddy walk, which she had lengthened to avoid the worst. We set off over heathland and were soon into woodland on reasonable tracks, and yes, despite having started in waterproofs, the sun started to shine.

Heading East down the wooded valley we then arrived at Yawl Hill, and stopped for a coffee break with magnificent views over Uplyme, and beyond to Lyme Bay.

Following an easy farm track down into Uplyme, we passed the church and joined the East Devon Way for the journey back. Then it was a steep uphill climb, briefly rewarded with the sight of a distant railway viaduct (*see pic on inside front cover*), towards Cathole Lane and Woodhouse Hill, before returning to the plantations around Trinity Hill. The autumn colours were still delightful in the woods, the worst of the mud was avoided, and we mostly had blue sky, so it was a very enjoyable and varied 7 mile walk, thanks to our leader Viv Insull.

Dee Woods

Weston Mouth and the Donkey Sanctuary – 24th November “Beyond Sidmouth”

Our group of 12 made a pretty good job of filling up the car park on Salcombe Hill (which says more about our inability to car share than a particularly large turnout). The usual suspects were in attendance, plus two very keen walkers from Clitheroe who were visiting one of our number. From the start, we made a beeline for the coast path with a minor diversion to view a Toposcope (we didn't believe David either, but Google it and see).



We then followed the coast path along to Weston Mouth. My memories of this section were the multitudinous steps and in the words of Little Richard - slippin' and slidin' - on the mud. Chris kept the seat of his pants clean on this occasion, whilst Sue Buss did go down onto one knee but this didn't qualify as a fall according to the strict OVA definition, i.e. mud on bum. Views were romantically ethereal and claims of Portland Bill sightings were assigned to the 'and pigs can fly' category. Light rain caught up with us as we ascended from Weston Mouth and we walked through the village to find welcome shelter in the excellent café at the Donkey Sanctuary where, as you can see from the picture left, one of our number decided to hitch a ride.

Proceeding into Salcombe Regis we stopped at the church and were informed that Norman Lockyer was buried there. Norman was a big cheese in the area around 100 years ago. He founded, amongst other things, the astronomical observatory that now bears his name and discovered the element Helium through his spectroscopic analysis of sunlight. Suitably enlightened we returned to our starting point. We were pretty much dried out by then and our leader, David Buss, had given us a good walk with loads of interesting info along the way, which I've forgotten already - no problem, it'll all seem fresh again on the same walk next year!

Jon Roseway

Lower Sweetcombe and Harcombe – 1st December “Beyond Sidmouth – the sequel”

The day looked promising with unseasonably mild temperatures as 11 walkers gathered at a pub car park in Sidford. An excellent starting point as it gave the promise of potential rewards a few hours later. The party leader, David Buss, described the walk as “a typical Devon countryside in autumn walk” with guaranteed mud (but not too much).

Soon the main road gave way to the back lanes and great countryside. The leader was doing an excellent job in pointing out the landmarks. The first was Boswell House, but his description of the property was soon taken on by a lady in the driveway who gave us a potted history of the ancient site and the C17 minor manor house. We proceeded to Knowle House (not to be confused with EDDC headquarters) and then upwards into woodland.

The walk had some fine views across the valley. There was some debate about the antiquity of a shaped piece of flint found on the track but the idea of a ‘Neolithic’ find was questioned.

Progress along muddy tracks was steady but not rapid. The planned coffee stop and resting point arrived at nearly half way but a decision was needed - continue and maybe be too late for a pub lunch or take a short cut involving an untested footpath across the valley which might be flooded. The risk and adventure appealed and the slight deviation was approved. It was wet but no worse than before and the stream had a good bridge.

The return leg was via Harcombe Hill and through Harcombe Wood. The architectural heritage included the leaders particular favourite – Beaconsgate (formerly the keepers cottage to Sidbury Manor and designed by Charles Cave in 1894 in the Arts and Crafts style). There was a discussion about the unusual ‘battered buttresses’ - the term evoking thoughts of food so the pace noticeably quickened as we descended back to Sidford. To match the quality of the buildings the natural environment got a look in as a ‘Brimstone’ butterfly was spotted (one of only a few butterflies to spend the winter in adult form).

Jim Pithouse

An ideal walk for a short Winter’s day – Colaton Raleigh – 5th December

It was an unusually windy day. Meteorologists talk about the Daily Wind Run – the average wind speed (in mph) for the day multiplied by 24. According to <http://www.newton-poppleford-weather.co.uk>, the Daily Wind Run on Saturday, 5 December was 337.4 miles, the highest of the year so far.

The stiff sou’wester brought a healthy glow to the cheeks of nine OVA walkers gathering in the lee of the 800 year old yew tree in Colaton Raleigh churchyard. It also meant that the green lanes and footpaths leading up the River Otter to Dotton were dry for the time of year. As we passed the Environment Agency measuring station, Haylor Lass explained how the volume of water in the river is constantly monitored both for flood warnings and, in dry periods, to prevent excessive water extraction. At Dotton Farm, the old farmyard was well sheltered from the prevailing wind by farm buildings which had been carefully positioned, thoughtfully designed and attractively built – a good example of a Victorian model farm.

After climbing via Monkey Lane and Goosemoor, we emerged into an exhilarating gale on the Common above Hawkerland. The contrast made one appreciate how effectively Devon banks and thick hedges keep the weather at bay. It is always a delight to walk along Naps Lane - easy walking in peaceful surroundings - and the conversation flowed free. In no time at all, the group were swinging down Shepherds Lane, with its eclectic mix of bungalows and striking modern houses taking full advantage of the view across to High Peak, to complete the circuit.

Brian Turnbull

The Otter Valley Association

Executive Committee (01395)

Chairman	Roger Saunders	443248
Vice-chairman	Haylor Lass	568786
Hon Secretary	<i>vacancy</i>	
Hon Treasurer	Trevor Waddington	443978

Committee Chairmen

Natural Environment	Patrick Hamilton	445351
Planning	Nicola Daniel	445960
History	David Daniel	445960
Events	<i>vacancy</i>	

Parish Representatives (to whom queries should be addressed initially)

Budleigh Salterton	George Maddaford	446077
East Budleigh	Jon Roseway	488739
Otterton	<i>vacancy</i>	
Colaton Raleigh	<i>vacancy</i>	
Newton Poppleford	Haylor Lass	568786

Other Executive Committee Members

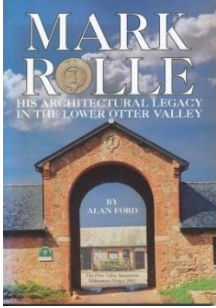
Assistant Minutes Secretary	Robert Wiltshire	444395
Membership Secretary	Clive Bowman membership@ova.org.uk	446892
Publicity Secretary	<i>vacancy</i>	

Other Contacts

Webmasters	David Daniel 445960 & Martin Smith	442333
Talks Organiser	Graham Knapton	445872
Walks Organisers	Chris Buckland Mike Paddison	444471 446550
Newsletter Distributors	Pam and Tony Harber	445392
Newsletter Editor	Jacqui Baldwin jacquibaldwin@btinternet.com	567599

Publications: Visit www.ova.org.uk or for book sales, contact Andrew Beresford by phone on 01395 446543 or email booksales@ova.org.uk

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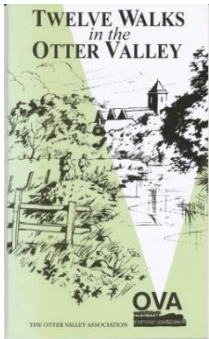


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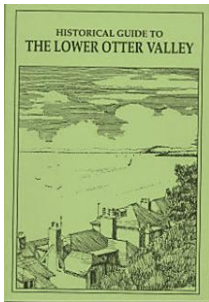
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Twelve Walks in the Otter Valley.

The area of the Lower Otter Valley is covered by a network of footpaths, mostly waymarked and in good condition. OVA members have compiled these walks, each with clear directions and illustrated with a sketch map. They range from 4 mile easy walks to a more energetic 9½ miler. There are notes on places of interest to whet your appetite for further exploration.

£3.00 from your village rep (or plus £2.00 P&P)



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Want to know more about the area you live in or are visiting? This book is packed with detailed information about the places, buildings, people and natural history of this beautiful area, from the very earliest times to the end of the 20th century.

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Leaflets

The OVA also publish a number of leaflets about the history, flora & fauna and walking in the lower Otter Valley. They can usually be found in the Tourist Information Centre and in other outlets around the valley.