

COUNTRY WALK IN THE RATTERY AREA, WEST OF DARTINGTON IN SOUTH DEVON START POINT 740 615

Sunday 12th March dawned bright, clear and very mild with the promise of temperatures more akin to the summer rather than the early spring. The easy country walk of 7 miles coupled with the warm sunny conditions certainly brought out the ramblers and over 50 of us congregated at the village hall car park at Rattery, just between the A38 and the A385 to Totnes about a mile from each road.



An outline map of the route we followed is shown on the map above. To follow the route in detail you should relate this outline and the description which follows to a 1:25000 ordnance survey map. The outdoor leisure 20 map of South Devon is the most suitable map to use. There seemed to be a higher than usual number of cars in the car park and there were many faces we didn't recognise. The reason soon became clear, there were two ramblers groups congregating at the car park for walks.



After welcoming new members and ensuring that we didn't have any Newton Abbot Ramblers to further swell the numbers, Tricia Mitchell led us out of the car park and towards the church, a few yards along the road we took the footpath to the right which took us downhill and away from

the village.

The track took us into fields on a bearing of about 110 degrees.

Passing a farm and continuing downhill we past over a stream and into a nice wooded stretch. We made our way over a substantial new wooden bridge, since the stream was underground at this point the need for the bridge was not immediately obvious. Perhaps in flood it runs overground.



We followed the track through the wooded area and soon emerged at a tiny hamlet called Bidwell with a handful of houses.



There was a pretty little stone bridge and a mother and child were enjoying the morning sunshine and the stream.

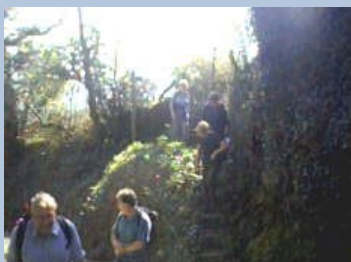
We didn't cross the bridge but turned right and made our way up a narrow road which brought us out to the busy A road which linked the A38 to Totnes.

Tricia was very concerned at this point since we had to walk along the road towards Totnes for two to three hundred yards around some blind bends. It was a far from ideal situation to have to shepherd 50+ ramblers along an 'A' road particularly one with no pavement.

We pressed on along the busy section of 'A' road, passing the village of Tigeley on our right and were pleased to soon turn left onto a footpath and away from the main road. We passed some rather nice thatched houses on the way to the brook and saw that one of them even had the luxury of a matching thatched garage.



Over the brook and into a field we stopped for morning coffee. After the break we were on our way again, now heading 070 degrees towards the next hamlet of Allerton. Passing a few more houses we turned due north across another field before moving onto a narrow road which took us up to Westcombe Farm.



We turned into the farmyard, no sign of a footpath sign, but it was a public right of way and we soon picked up a track which led us uphill on 020 degrees. The track led us through a couple of gates and into a field which brought us to quite a difficult stone stile with a steep drop down to the road on the other side.

After a slight detour, we soon found ourselves walking down a hill along the road before turning left down a track for a half a mile descent to Water Lane End. En route we passed the Newton Abbot Ramblers group who were walking in the opposite direction.

At the bottom of the track we entered a field with some large electricity pylons and just north of us was a very distinctive almost circular hill.

No wonder it is called Hood Ball since it certainly is shaped like a ball.



Up on Dartmoor to the north there are many Tors to break up the landscape. Hood Ball was one of the only really prominent hillocks we found in this area. If it had been up on Dartmoor, doubtless it would have been called Hood Ball Tor, down at the lower altitudes the Tors don't exist.



We parked ourselves under the electricity pylons for our lunch break and to enjoy the summer like conditions for a half hour or so.

Many decided to move further up the field away from the pylons to avoid the radiation emanating from the grid system above our heads perhaps.

After lunch we left the field and turned left and walked along a narrow road west past Velwell. The road wound around for a few hundred yards until we saw a sign to our left, indicating an unmetalled road heading west and uphill. The contours on the map indicated that we entered the uphill stretch at a height of 60 metres.

The track meandered uphill for the best part of a mile and at the top we had an impromptu stop to regather both the group and our breath. The contour at the top of the hill indicated 170 metres so we had climbed 110 metres or 450 feet during the mile ascent. That was to be virtually the last and really the only ascent of any difficulty during the walk.

The track took us by Brownston Farm across a 'B' road and down to Willing Gate where we rejoined a metalled road which led us back to Rattery under a mile to the West.

We walked a couple of steep downhill and uphill sections but they were only short. There were some beautiful daffodils out at the top of the hedge and a few yards further down the hill we passed a violet nursery, specialising in that beautiful flower. The entrance sign indicated that they sold a wide variety of violets, however the village beckoned and we continued on towards the church steeple get ever closer.



Entering the village we took a short cut up by the village pub. The pub has been there since the 10th Century and is one of the oldest pubs in Devon. I wondered what it would have looked like all those centuries ago.

We made our way downhill, passing the turning to the footpath we had started on at 10.30 A.M and returned to the village hall car park at about 2.45 PM.

It had made a change to have a country walk and the sun had been out all day. Thanks were passed on to Trish and Mitch Mitchell for organising and leading the walk and we were on our way back to Plymouth some 15 miles away. As we passed the KPMG building at Marsh Mills the electronic thermometer was displaying 20 degrees

centigrade, a good 11 degrees higher than we would normally expect to get at this time of year.