

OTTER VALLEY ASSOCIATION

Summer 2022 Newsletter

OVA PO BOX 70

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Reg. Charity No. 278266

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Front cover: "Budleigh Salterton Cricket Ground" *The Editor*

From the (New) Editor

It is a privilege to be your Interim Editor. I will continue to keep you up-to-date with news from the many other environmental organisations that operate in the Otter Valley, as well as topical matters of interest. With these agencies there is potential for OVA to be involved in monitoring the environmental changes that will take place during the evolution of the inter-tidal mudflats created by the Lower Otter Restoration Project (LORP). We need your help to promote and achieve this objective. You can write to us about the LORP and other OVA matters by sending us an e-mail (editor@ova.org). A selection of your letters will be published in our new "Letters to the Editor" section, which will appear in subsequent issues.

Browsing through the last several years of this Newsletter, I can appreciate the huge amount of work that our retiring Editor, Jacqui Baldwin contributed to OVA. In order to continue to deliver a wide-ranging collection of news and views about what is happening in our back-yard, I will be seeking to follow Jacqui's example.

Andrew Kingsnorth, The Editor & vice-Chair (editor@ova.org)

Chairman's Musings

Sadly, we failed to produce a Spring Edition, however our gallant Vice Chairman has raised his hand and is going to become the editor, until he hopefully becomes our Chairman at next year's AGM. He won't be able to do both jobs. So as they say in the TV programme, The Apprentice, 'the search goes on'. Not to find a partner for Lord Sugar, but to find an editor for our Newsletter.

We are still missing some key members of the committee. Specifically an Events Organiser, without whom we are unable to carry out some of the outdoor activities which are waiting to be put into action. Also a Talks Organiser. Dare I say it, but both jobs could be done by the same person as they are seasonal. If you are adverse to being a committee person, it would not necessarily be a pre-requisite.

The AGM in May went well. It was particularly important as we were able to introduce our new Constitution. This one is somewhat longer than its predecessor but has the merit of being based on the template supplied by the Charities Commission. Having received unanimous approval, it is now sent off to the CC for their approval. A similar exercise took place with the Privacy Policy. On this occasion the template from the Information Commissioner's Office was used. Again unanimous approval was recorded. Our previous policies were not incorrect, but we felt that they needed updating. AGM's can be a tedious affair, but without our brave 41 attendees we would not have had sufficient persons to make a quorum and without this we cannot function. Thank you all who were able to attend.

East Budleigh is shortly to erect a Blue Plaque, organised by local historian Michael Downes. This is to commemorate the crossing of the Atlantic and the subsequent activities of one Roger Conant. We have made a contribution to finance this, read more further in this edition.

We recently became aware that the telephone box opposite the Spar shop in Budleigh was in very poor decorative order and BT had gutted the interior. This was part of their policy to withdraw from little used phone boxes. The phone box on Marine Parade is to remain as it available for emergencies. It transpires that the Spar box was offered to Budleigh Salterton Town Council, but they expressed no interest. Being aware that this box is on the Heritage Asset List for Budleigh we feared for its removal. We then discovered that the PTA of St Peter's Junior School in Budleigh had bought the box for uses yet to be decided. Being part of our ethos, we have elected to finance the refurbishment of the box.

We continue to finance the purchase of wildflower seeds to parishes within our Area of Benefit, in the case of Colaton Raleigh, the amount of £500 was awarded. They don't come cheap. The strict provision is that the seeds are only used in areas of public access. If any of you are aware of any project in our area, which is within our remit, the Exec. Committee would be happy to consider whether we can be of assistance. We try to use the funds of the OVA in a meaningful way, which is of benefit to the community.

Enjoy the summer.

Bob Wiltshire, Chairman

The Lower Otter Restoration Project (LORP)

Our readers were introduced to the environmental changes to be expected from the LORP by Dr Samuel Bridgewater in our Spring 2021 issue. As head of Wildlife and Conservation at Clinton Devon Estates. Sam identified the OVA as a key stakeholder, with a role in monitoring the success of the project.

The infrastructure required to bring about the return of the Lower Otter Valley to its natural state, began over a year ago. However, as exciting as it may be to watch a major civil engineering project in action, it is what that massive earth-moving and complex bridge-building is going to deliver in the form of wildlife transformation, that is of much greater interest. A team of ecologists monitors disturbance of wildlife habitats daily and modifies work patterns to protect habitats. For example, tree felling and vegetation clearance was halted in spring 2021 to prevent disturbance of nesting-birds.

The disturbance of the road-building does not seem to have significantly diminished the bird population as recorded on a whiteboard situated at Whitebridge by bird-spotters – and includes the following impressive list for sightings in June: green woodpecker, swallow, reed warbler, sedge warbler, linnets, dunlin, whimbrel, goldcrest, blackcap, willow warbler, wheatear, Cetti's warbler, little egret, grey heron, garden warbler, whitethroat, sparrow hawk, water-rail, moorhen, jay, reed bunting, grey wagtail, mistle thrush, chiffchaff, goldcrest, chaffinch, greenfinch, nuthatch, starling, carrion crow, buzzard, rook, jackdaw, house sparrow, dunnock, swallow, swift, house martin, mute swan, pied wagtail, shelduck, goldfinch, kingfisher, bullfinch, song thrush, spotted flycatcher, Canada goose, greater spotted woodpecker, mallard blue tit and great tit.



Planting of hedgerows to the north of Little Bank is also taking place, including hawthorn, blackthorn and dog rose, which have been planted in among gaps in existing hedgerows. The LORP project will see a net gain of 1.5km of hedgerow when completed.



The rare divided sedge (*Carex divisa*; a yellow-tipped grass-like plant) is found in few sites in the South West; the Lower Otter is the only known place in Devon. These plants will be threatened by the rising sea levels and therefore they are being moved to new sites. One of these sites is in the Axe estuary, where divided sedge had been known to grow but was last recorded as present in 1934. Also being moved are some of the populations of galingale (*Cyperus longus*).

There are also lots of fledglings around the site and many house martins are collecting mud from the margins of the creek network to build their nests.



The well-being of small mammals is being carefully looked after. An area on the eastern side of the old landfill site next to South Farm Road, a potential site for hibernating dormice, was cut to 30cm high in the autumn and the remaining bramble will be cleared down to ground level during the next few weeks.

The Environment Agency led LORP project is one of two schemes under the European Regional Development Fund's *Interreg France Channel England funded Promoting Adaptation to Changing Coasts – PACCo* project. The second site of the total €25.7m project is in the Saône Valley in Quiberville, Normandy.

With acknowledgement to Kier Construction, the Environment Agency and : www.lowerotterrestorationproject.co.uk

The Editor

River Otter beaver news – June 2022

Eight years after Devon Wildlife Trust harnessed local residents' enthusiasm for the River Otter beavers and created England's first wild beaver re-introduction project, 2022 is providing another summer of excellent beaver-watching opportunities. As in previous years, the stretch of river south of Otterton, from the road bridge down to the Budleigh Brook, has seen regular evening appearances from the pink tag and green tag pair and their yearlings. At time of writing in late June, we are expecting to see kits soon, as 'pink tag' was pregnant again in spring and she has birthed a higher-than-average number of young in recent years.

There has been an increase in reports of concerns about dogs entering the river here this year, so we would remind beaver-watchers that for the safety of both beaver kits and smaller dogs it is best to keep dogs under close control on the riverbank near Otterton in summer.



River Otter beaver with kit (Photo: David White)

In recent weeks, a new lodge has been reported in an upstream area of the catchment, showing beaver pairs continuing to establish new territories. Since the end of the River Otter Beaver Trial, hydrologists from the University of Exeter have been profiling effluents of the River Otter to determine on which of these streams beaver activity would have the most positive impacts on flood and drought alleviation, and water quality. On leaving the family group at the age of two, beavers have collectively explored most of the catchment by now. Results of the hydrology research are leading DWT to work with landowners on habitat improvements to try to encourage beavers to remain in those optimal areas. By planting bankside willows to provide both food and dam-building material, by starting to hold back water by creating woody-debris dams, and by digging ponds next to watercourses to encourage beavers to create their own dams and set up a lodge, DWT will be making beaver-friendly habitats so these amazing animals can transform many more watercourses for the better.



Beaver on the Otter (Photo: Sam Alexander, Devon Wildlife Trust Photography)

It's been a time of change for DWT staff on the River Otter. Some readers will have had contact over the years with either Mark Elliott, who led the Trust's beaver conservation for a decade, or Jake Chant, who as Beaver Field Officer was the charity's presence on the ground for work with riparian landowners and delivering events for the public. Both left DWT early this year, though Jake is now National Beaver Officer for Natural England so will no doubt still be an occasional visitor to the Otter. DWT's beaver team now consists of Matt Holden - an experienced freshwater ecologist - and Bex Fraser, who will most often be seen in the Otter valley in her Field Officer role, having previously worked with beavers on the National Trust's Holnicote estate in Somerset.

If you have any questions or concerns, sightings or other information about beavers and beaver activity anywhere in the Otter catchment, the DWT email address beavers@devonwildlifetrust.org is still active and is monitored on an almost daily basis throughout the year.

Dan Smith, Devon Wildlife Trust

Waterborne recreation

Various aspects of the LORP have been discussed at different stages of this project, by your Executive Committee. One subject which has caused particular concern, is the possibility or indeed probability of this new expanse of water being used by waterborne recreational craft. To draw the attention of our concerns to many persons and organisations, I sent out the following letter in February this year.

The Otter Valley Association, which is supportive of the LORP, is particularly concerned that when the project reaches completion it will become a magnet for waterborne recreational craft. This is likely to have an adverse effect on wildlife, particularly birds. It has already been witnessed in areas which are presently subject to tidal effect. As I understand it, current laws allow navigation on all tidal areas only when accessed from the sea.

Please use any influence that you may have to support the drawing up of byelaws by EDDC to prevent the tidal areas in the Lower Otter Valley, being used for this purpose.'

This letter was sent to our MP, EDDC, RSPB, AONB, CPRE, Devon Wildlife Trust, Clinton Devon Estates and numerous councillors and councils. Of the many that responded, much support was given.

Bob Wiltshire (with apologies for all the acronyms).

Nightjars on the Pebblebed Heath

Nightjars are summer visitors that inhabit open woodland (mainly clear-felled conifer plantations) and heathland and, in Devon, are mainly found on Dartmoor, in Haldon Forest and on the Pebblebed Heaths in East Devon, arriving in late April and May, having over-wintered in Africa, mainly south of the equator. The last birds are usually found in August. They feed primarily on moths and beetles and are therefore almost entirely active at night and require a well-wooded area with open areas for foraging. They nest on the ground, well hidden within the vegetation. Because they are nocturnal, they are rather rarely seen although the population up on the heaths is quite large.

Nightjars are quite large birds, about the size of a small jackdaw, and are remarkably well camouflaged with a mottled-brown plumage so that, even when one is about to step on one, they are extremely hard to see. By day, they stay motionless on a branch (lying lengthwise) or on the ground, blending in almost perfectly with their surroundings. Nightjars forage over quite a wide area around their nesting territory. They possess a very large mouth with strong bristles at the corners to help catch their prey which are caught whilst on the wing. They are quite strong flyers but, when seen on their nesting grounds, they generally have a rather butterfly-like flight with intermittent glides.

Nightjars are widespread in Europe and are found as far east as Soviet Central Asia, although all populations overwinter in Africa. As with many other bird species, the populations elsewhere in the UK and Europe have decreased, but here in Devon, the nightjar population has remained quite strong; indeed, the population increased significantly between the 1977-85 census and that in 2007-13. This is thought to be mainly due to the felling of mature conifer plantations (particularly larch plantations infected by the fungus *Phytophthora*) and better management of the heathlands.



Nightjar on the Pebblebed Heath (Photo: David White)

Because nightjars are nocturnal, they are hard to see – but are not actually very hard to find. This is because their song is a far-carrying reel or churr that is often audible on a still night up to a km away. At close range, it is an almost continuous, very loud intense rattling sound which, with occasional short pauses, they can keep up for long periods of time. Whilst churring, the sound can change significantly in intensity and tone, perhaps due to the birds moving its head, and then it can sound as though the sound is coming from a different position. They almost always sing sitting lengthwise on a tree branch, mainly a conifer.

For anyone wishing to hear (or even see) a nightjar, the local pebblebed heaths are an excellent place to go. Whilst the churring can go on all night, it is often most intense at dusk. At this time of year (June), they can often be heard just by parking the car on the margins of one of the heaths. And, if one was to walk around the heaths at dusk near a churring bird, they will often fly around one (checking you out!) when their characteristic flight can be seen. Why not have a go?

Chris Hodgson

Chelsea Flower Show 2022 featured the River Otter beavers

There were 39 gardens at this year's Chelsea Flower Show, made up of 13 Show Gardens, 12 Sanctuary Gardens, four Balcony Gardens, five Container Gardens, four All About Plants gardens and one Feature Garden. The Gold Award Show Garden, and the People's Choice Award went to “*A Rewilding Britain Landscape*” by Lulu Urquhart and Adam Hunt.

The garden showed a rewilding landscape in South West England (aka The Lower Otter River), after the reintroduction of a native, keystone species – the beaver. With swaying multi-stemmed willows and scented wildflowers, the garden reflected the rich landscape that evolves when nature’s eco-engineers, such as beavers, are able to flourish.

'While all of this year’s gardens are sensational, a few really stood out,' said RHS Chair of Judges, James Alexander-Sinclair. 'It was a hard-fought debate between the members of the judging panel to decide which garden to award Best in Show. In the end, all the judges were captivated by the skill, endeavour and charm of *A Rewilding Britain Landscape* – every step is exquisite.'



A Rewilding Britain Landscape (Photo: Royal Horticultural Society)

There was something for everyone this year's Show, with each garden – however big or small – providing inspiration and take-home ideas while raising awareness about the environment or the positive effects of gardening for mental health.

The Editor

History

Surgeon-Major Henry John Carter FRS; a re-appraisal

A short distance up the footpath from Fore Street Hill to Watch Hill in Budleigh Salterton there is an OVA blue plaque on a large house, "The Cottage" dedicated to *Dr H J Carter FRS, 1813-95*. This rather under-states his achievements, omitting the fact that he was a surgeon, soldier, geologist and naturalist. On successfully passing the College of Surgeon's exams, a Doctor reverts to being a "Mister". If subsequently in addition, he gains a military (or academic) rank, his title becomes Surgeon-"Rank"

Henry John Carter (1813-95) was a surgeon working in Mumbai, India, who carried out work in geology, palaeontology, and zoology. He worked as an army surgeon in Bombay from 1859 on Her Majesty's Indian Service, Bombay Establishment. He edited a collection of geological papers on Western India, including a summary of the geology of India in 1857.

Henry joined the Devon and Exeter Hospital at the age of sixteen, and graduated from University College, London in 1837 and obtained admission to the Royal College of Surgeons in 1838. He was house surgeon for a year and then conservator of the museum. He visited Ecole de Medecine in Paris in 1840 and joined the East India Company in 1841. He served in Calcutta, Madras and Mauritius. He saw action at the battle of Hyderabad in Sindh on March 24, 1843 under Sir Charles Napier. He served with the 21st regiment of foot in the desert where he suffered ill health. He served on the survey ship Palinurus from 1844 to 1846 when he became an assistant civil surgeon at Bombay. He served as an honorary secretary at the Medical and Physical Society and at the Royal Asiatic Society. He worked on the geology and palaeontology of western India, founding a natural history society in 1856 that did not live very long.



Henry retired to England in 1862 with the rank of Surgeon-Major and settled in his native place, Budleigh Salterton where he then married Anne Doyle from Sligo, Ireland in 1864 and they had a daughter Annie in 1866. On 4 October 1888 he suffered from a paralytic attack which impaired his speech and eyesight. In the spring of 1895 his health declined seriously, and he died on the evening of 4 May. He is buried at East Budleigh.

Henry took a special interest in sponges and was awarded the Royal Society's Royal Medal in 1872 for "...his long continued and valuable researches in zoology, and more especially for his inquiries into the natural history of the *Spongiadae*." Sponges live in freshwater, preferring shallow, clear water in ponds, lakes, and slow-moving waters. One can imagine Henry indulging his passion in the upper tributaries of the river Otter.

The Editor (retired surgeon)

A tribute to East Budleigh's other hero

The OVA was pleased to be able to contribute to a recent successful fund-raising campaign honouring a local historical figure with important transatlantic links.

Sir Walter Raleigh and Roger Conant are recognised as early European adventurers in the New World. Both were born in the 16th century but a generation apart, in East Budleigh. While Raleigh never visited North America, Conant emigrated to New England in around 1623. He founded a great American

dynasty, as well as the city of Salem, Massachusetts which will celebrate its 400th anniversary in 2026.

Historians have long recognised that the achievements of East Budleigh's other hero have been overshadowed by the more flamboyant Raleigh, while acknowledging his virtues. 'Humble as is his name in history, Roger Conant still is of that class of men who do not merely find, but make, their place in the system of human affairs: a man of thoughtful strength, he has planted the germ of a city,' wrote the 19th century American author Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Conant has been praised for his leadership and his integrity. Most notably he was an early settler quoted by some historians as friendly to Native Americans. 'Unflinching in his course when a principle was at stake, he was ever ready to sacrifice his own wishes and interests to the greatest public good,' wrote the Massachusetts historian Alice Lapham in 1930.



Prints of John Washington's painting, 'Blessed are the Peacemakers', are available from the artist.

Roger Conant is also remembered for his attitude of tolerance and conciliation among the early settlers of New England. In 1625 he intervened in a dispute between some West Country fishermen and Puritan soldiers led by the

pugnacious Captain Myles Standish. The episode in which possible bloodshed was averted has been commemorated in a fine painting recently completed by Budleigh Salterton artist John Washington.

A large millstone in East Budleigh came from the mill thought to have been leased by the Conant family. A group of local residents who have set up the Roger Conant 400 Club plan to erect a blue plaque there commemorating his voyage to America.

Conant's descendants have been thrilled to learn about the Club's activities on behalf of their ancestor. His 9x-granddaughter, retired psychologist Luli Emmons, flew with her husband all the way from California to spend some time in the area over the recent Jubilee weekend. 'This has been a whirlwind and wonderful trip,' she wrote. 'Please know how grateful we are to you for bringing our ancestry to life. I can't imagine not coming back.'

Links are also being forged between the Roger Conant 400 Club and the city of Salem, including with the Salem Historical Society. Its president Robin Woodman hopes to visit East Budleigh. At the First Church in Salem, where Conant was a co-founder of one of the earliest churches of its kind in the US, they were delighted to learn about Conant's birthplace. The First Church's Diane Smith told us: 'We celebrate him regularly as the founder of Naumkeag and his relationship to the indigenous people of Cape Ann.'

Chair of the Roger Conant 400 Club Professor Stan Roberts is most grateful for the OVA's positive support for the blue plaque project.

The 'Clump'

The clump of three old Scots Pines perched high on a rounded hill to the east of the River Otter in Otterton is quite a local landmark. Exposed to the elements on all sides, it can be an inhospitable spot in bad weather. Falling limb by limb, the old trees are gradually coming to the end of their days.

Some five years ago, it was decided to plant new trees to replace the old. Ground was cleared and prepared to the west of the existing trees. Unsurprisingly, the soil was shallow and very stony. With some ceremony, 6 new trees were planted, staked and guarded. Sadly, after only a short while, cattle in

the neighbouring field ate and trampled the saplings. It was decided to replant the following year once a sturdy fence had been put in place to protect them. With hindsight, it is most likely that the trees would have soon died naturally anyway as they were planted in spring rather than autumn and there was no means of watering them. It was decided to replant the following autumn. to protect them. This was done thanks to a generous grant from the AONB.

At the second attempt an OVA working party cleared the whole site of nettles and brambles and fifteen smaller year old saplings were planted across the hilltop, with some ceremony, and assisted by children from Otterton Primary School. A stake and wire netting fence had been erected to keep out cattle and Roe Deer and a water pipe and tap installed linked in to a nearby trough. What could possibly go wrong? second attempt. An OVA working party cleared...

The weeks immediately following the planting were warm and dry. Despite regular watering, many of the saplings struggled and within 12 months only one of the 15 had survived. The hilltop was proving even more inhospitable than expected. Quite why Scots Pines were originally chosen for the hill-top, other than them being British natives, is hard to understand. Since their planting, the climate has clearly warmed. We will never know how much effort went into getting those first trees established.

A third attempt replaced the fourteen lost saplings. These were again given much T.L.C. to try and ensure they survived the at times extended periods of drought in their first year. Even so a number, especially those planted amongst the original old trees didn't survive. Storms this spring battered the Clump taking a large limb off one of the old pines and blowing over the tree guards. Nine saplings have survived, fallen branches cut back, brambles and nettles around them cleared, guards replaced and some extended. All nine are putting on new growth but some doing markedly better than others. Those around the more open exterior, especially to the west are the ones that are doing well and should become visible not too far into the future.

The smaller trees may well need watering again through hot dry periods this summer. Although this Spring, all the saplings survived fallen branches some may not be so lucky as the old trees fail. As the current survivors are growing relatively close together, the day will come where some will need to be removed to give others space to develop properly. Further saplings may be planted this autumn to try and provide more of a spread but there is now confidence that at least three new trees will one day replace the old.

The Clump is situated on private land not open to the public.

Geoff Porter

Natural Environment Committee

Comment from Chairman: This project has been led by Geoff who has put in a huge amount of time and effort to ensure success. Well done!



WALK PROGRAMME: 2022 July – September 2022

There is something for everyone, so please take a look and continue to monitor the website for any further additions or alterations.

Many thanks to the Walk Leaders.

Happy Walking

The Walk Team

Bookings: where a walk requires booking, this is not to limit numbers but in the case of unavoidable last-minute changes of plan that need to be communicated to any likely participants. If you would like to contact the Walk team our email address is: walks@ova.org.uk

Tuesday 5 July – 10.00am – 7.75 miles. Moderate

'Double Barrelled Dorset'

Meet: Catherston Leweston Road, Charmouth, roadside parking. Nearest post code DT6 6QL. (OS116 SY 369 937)

Catherston Leweston, Wootton Fitzpaine and Whitchurch Canonicorum.

Bring a picnic. No booking required

Walk Leaders: Paul & Fran Dike 01297 20695 / 07977 057546

Wednesday 13 July – 10.00am – 6.5 miles – 3.5 hours

'Around Sidbury Castle'

Meet: Roadside parking Harcombe Lane, Sidford (OS 115, SY 140 900)

The walk begins with a steep climb up Bucton Hill and a steep descent to Sidbury before continuing upwards to White Cross. There should be some wonderful views along the route if the weather is good, so well worth the effort. Bring a flask for a coffee stop. Optional drink at the Blue Ball afterwards.

Walk Leader: Graham Knapton 01395 445872

Wednesday 20 July - 10.00am – walking distance 5-7 miles

"Take the ferry to Starcross"

(Or get to the station by train/ car if you prefer) for an 11am start.

We will explore the paths and quiet roads along the estuary around Powderham and Kenton, before returning to Starcross. Walking distance 5-7 miles, bring a packed lunch.

Further details to follow, please check the website at the end of June. Please let the walk leaders know by the evening of 19 July if you are coming on this walk.

You can call the landline; text 07792 619748 or email pandpkurowski.me.uk

Walk Leaders: Penny and Paul Kurowski. 01395 742942

Wednesday 27 July – 10.00am – 6 miles – 3 hours

'The Far Side'

Meet: Crook Plantation (OS115, SY 056 865)

Woodbury Castle, Canterbury Green and Hawkerland Cross. No booking required

Walk Leader: Brian Turnbull. 01395 567339.

Tuesday 2nd August - 10.00am – 5 miles, 3 hours. Booking required.

Meet: Four Firs car park (OS 115, SY 032 864). ***"Reserve and Reservoir"***

From Four Firs we walk past the ever-changing gravel pits to Fryingpans, then alongside Hayes Wood to Shortwood Common. Return via Dalditch, Squabmoor Reservoir, and Devon Wildlife Trust's Bystock Nature Reserve. A moderate walk with a coffee stop part way round (so bring a flask).

Booking required via the leader, opens seven days in advance.

Bookings: rdandamhussey@hotmail.com or 01395 227991

Mobile for contact on the day only: 07902 255915

Walk Leader: Ross Hussey

Tuesday 16 August – 5.5 miles about 2.5 hours walking

'Train Walk: Exton to Topsham via Woodbury!'

Meet: Catch the 10.23am train from Exmouth to Exton arriving Exton 10.30am.

We walk from Exton station along quiet lanes and paths to Woodbury and then

on through Ebford to Topsham. There are plenty of places in Topsham for lunch if you like, before returning by train to Exmouth. It is best to buy a return ticket to Topsham.

Walk Leaders: Penny and Paul Kurowski. 01395 742942

Wednesday 24 August – 10.00am – 7 miles. 4 hours

'River Otter and Aylesbeare Common'

Meet: Joney's Cross CP (OS 115, SY 0572 8972).

This walk takes us on a trip around Newton Poppleford on riverbanks, footpaths, green lanes and quiet roads. We follow the East Devon Way down to the River Otter and divert onto the river path as far as Colaton Raleigh. Then we head across to Stoneyford via Naps Lane and back to the start. Bring refreshments and a packed lunch.

Walk Leader: Jon Roseway 01395 488739/ 07887936280

Thursday 15 September – 10.00am – 7 miles. 4.5 hours

'An Exetuary walk'

Meet: Exminster Marshes nature reserve CP (OS 110, SX 9538 8721).

A mostly flat walk along the towpath of the Exeter Ship canal past the Turf Inn and then the embankment of the Exe estuary to Powderham. Turning inland the route returns on quiet lanes to Exminster.

Walk Leader: Jon Roseway 01395 488739/ 07887936280

Tuesday 20 September – 10.00am - approx 6.75 miles

'Anyone for Tennis'

Meet: Bridport Football Club car park. Skilling Hill Road, Bridport, DT6 5LA (OS OL15 SY 464 922)

CP charge £2 all day (*note: may have increased by September*). The entrance is in the road which is almost opposite the entrance to Morrisons and behind Palmer's Brewery Building.

West Bay, Bothenhampton, Shipton Gorge, Hyde Hill, Bridport. No booking required.

Walk Leaders: Paul & Fran Dike 01297 20695 / 07977 057546

Tuesday 27 September -10.00am – 7 miles. 4 hours

'Moor and Riverside'

Meet: Colaton Raleigh Church (OS115, SY 082 872)

Passaford Lane (stiff climb!), Keble's Seat, Northmostown, Harpford and Dotton. Bring picnic lunch. No booking required

Walk Leader: Brian Turnbull. 01395 567339

Walk Reports

Thursday, 17th March “Patteson’s Way” with Haylor Lass

Ten of us assembled with Ruth and Haylor Lass outside St Andrew’s church in Feniton to walk this newly developed pilgrimage route that celebrates the life of John Patteson on the 150th anniversary of his demise. He grew up in Feniton, went to school in Ottery, served curacy at Alfington, and became the first Bishop of Melanesia, where he was martyred.

Before setting off, Haylor showed us the Patteson family tomb in the churchyard and a door in the wall that provided a shortcut for the family to access the church from their home, the impressive Feniton Court. We set off across open fields with views across the upper Otter Valley, then the noisy A30 and quieter Exeter-Waterloo railway line to reach Fenny Bridges. From there, the route goes parallel to the River Otter as far as the church of St James and St Anne in Alfington. The church warden was waiting to greet us and offered us strands of wool from her own sheep to tie onto a tree in the churchyard dedicated to Bishop Patteson in honour of his sacrifice. He could have lived a very comfortable life in Alfington, but instead chose missionary work in little-known isolated islands in the Pacific Ocean.



After being treated to coffee at the old school house, we continued along the Otter Valley to the parish church in Ottery St Mary. Patteson would have known this church well as a boy, when he was at school in the town and lived with his uncle nearby. This was our lunch stop and opportunity to see St Stephens chapel with its commemoration of Patteson's work in Melanesia.

Our return journey was alongside the River Otter and then a diversion to the old A30 to view Patteson's Cross, which was erected in his honour in 1873, two years after his death. From there it was a short distance across fields and along lanes back to Feniton church.

Jon Roseway

Thursday, 24th March "A walk from Broadhembury and a glide back" with Jane Kewley

The promise of a fine sunny day enticed seventeen keen walkers to join Jane on her walk, which started in the very picturesque village of Broadhembury with its numerous thatched and cob cottages. We first walked to the village of Kerswell, through fields of sheep and quiet lanes. Then up to the hamlet of Orwell, mentioned in the Domesday book in 1086 as a settlement in the hundred of Silverton. There were 8 villagers, 6 small holders and 1 slave and the tenant-in-chief was Alfred of Spain. The annual value when acquired was one pound ten shillings.

Some more climbing brought us to Saint Hill where we stopped for refreshments in the grounds of the Baptist church, a very pleasant spot with fine views of the surrounding countryside. Then a final push to the start of the woods and Rhododendron Wood, a flat walk which took us to the perimeter of the Devon and Somerset gliding club airfield. Once we reached the road we started our descent and after a grand total of twelve stiles, some of which were the highest I have ever encountered, we caught sight of St Andrew's church back in Broadhembury with its 30 metre high tower.

It was lovely to see all the Devon banks bursting with spring flowers of primroses, lesser celandine and daffodils, to see the birds flying around busy building their nests and the lambs frolicking in the fields. Several of us stopped

for a late lunch in the Drewe Arms next to the church. Thank you, Jane, for an interesting walk in an unfamiliar area.



Heather Fereday

Tuesday, 19th April “Down the Culm and up the Clyst” with Jon Roseway

Two days after Easter the car park at Killerton House was the rendezvous for the walk. We knew the weather forecast:

‘Remaining dry all day at the coast with (at Killerton) a 50% chance of rain at noon’ At our starting time of 10.00am fourteen OVA members were enjoying bright sunshine and expanses of azure sky interspersed with billowing white clouds, just as occurs in Provence in mid-May. The light breeze complemented this wonderful warm weather for walking.

Knowing the plan was to walk eight miles by about 3.00pm Jon’s reasonably brisk walking pace set the ‘timbre’. After passing between the tall posts and splendid gates of the driveway to the main house we walked westwards over the closely grazed pasture. Part of this section of the footpath follows the ha-ha that is

between Killerton's formal garden and where we were walking. At the field boundary the defined footpath took us northwards and upwards to the edge of Columbjohn Wood where stands a large wooden frame of classic proportion, about 16 by 9, through which photographers can position and frame a vista across the landscape.

Now our direction was westwards, through the wood where native bluebells were in bloom, their numbers lessened by recent timber clearances. Afterwards we saw two young calves, both lying alongside the wires marking the boundary of their field with our narrow footpath. Their mothers like the calves appeared untroubled by our touching-distance presence. The tranquillity was striking. During the refreshment stop at nearby Columbjohn Chapel, from where there are fine views across the water meadows of the meandering River Culm, the peace and quiet apart from birdsong was surprisingly broken: a distant rumble followed by a green flash of reflected sunlight from a London-bound train. Moments later a silver flash was seen from another train travelling in the opposite direction.

As our walk continued we learnt of aspects about the land use of this predominantly agricultural and sylvan landscape that we had not expected. From an information board we read that the usage of the River Culm's water meadows is changing, for this is where National Trust (NT) plans to establish an extensive wildlife conservation area, thereby encouraging carbon sequestration too. Though the grazing of cattle on these meadows alongside the river has continued by successive generations of local NT tenant farmers this grazing practice is not now compatible with NT's future strategy for the locality.

Not far away, well before we reached our lunch stop in Broadclyst, the forward edge of the expanding urbanisation of Exeter is unexpectedly visible along a distant ridge. Much nearer, amongst the lattice of irregularly shaped fields and within an 'island' site enclosed by hedgerows, accessed only by a minor road, we walked by a modern, metal-clad, windowless, warehousing building and outdoor storage development, all of far greater vertical mass and extent than any of the farmsteads we saw that day. Within its high-fenced compound blue metal boxes were stacked in double decker formation, the type of boxes that can be carried by articulated lorries and transportable on ocean-going ships. It was strange to see this type of commercial development in such a bucolic setting: neither did we expect to see in the far distance a field covered with solar panels reflecting bright sunlight, nor hear sounds towards the end of the walk of a surprising nature.

Having followed a causeway interspersed with wooden mini-bridges across the normally boggy floodplain of the upper reaches of the River Clyst the clock of Broadclyst Parish Church struck one o'clock as we sat in its grounds during the lunch stop. Jon's meticulous planning and steady walking pace meant there was time to browse around the church yard. We saw the military graves of local men, several in their teens, who had fallen either in the first or in the second World Wars. Their profound message was: *'We must remember them and never forget their sacrifices'*.



We knew already that the M5 motorway bisects NT's Killerton estate. Wherever we were, and especially in this church yard, we observed that vehicle noise was much reduced when one faced in the direction of the breeze and at the same time listened to the Spring birdsong. And so back to Killerton, with its elegant, cuboid-shaped, flat-roofed house built by the Acland family that had been visible between the tall silhouettes of trees for most of our well-signposted walk. Along this last section of footpath we noticed, for only the second time that day, another of the many wildflowers we had spotted on the verges and in the fields. Lady's Smock (or Cuckoo Flower so named as it flowers when cuckoos return from the Tropics) were standing like sentries on parade.

The insights and pleasures that we gained from walking in this varied landscape are many. The wildflowers in the lanes and hedgerows, the buzzing bees searching for nectar ensuring that the flowers are pollinated, the cattle, sheep and pigs in the pastures, and the stimulating conversations with fellow walkers all contributed to our enjoyment.

The weather remained dry. The sight just before lunch of an approaching large black cloud whilst walking in the parish of Poltimore was a tease, but the cloud's direction which was towards us suddenly changed. There was an intervention which altered its tract: our Easter blessing!

What were the other unexpected sounds? After the visual enjoyment of our second sighting of Lady's Smock we were serenaded by sows and their numerous squealing piglets!

Thank you, Jon, for your splendid efforts in preparing and leading this excellent walk.

Derek and Elizabeth Carter

Letters to the Editor

Watch this space!

Future issues will print selected views and comments from our readers.

The Otter Valley Association

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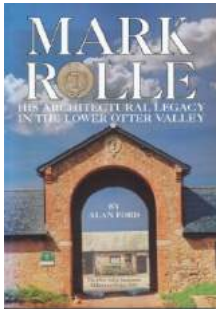
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The OVA also publish a number of leaflets about the history, flora & fauna and walking in the lower Otter Valley. They can usually be found in the Tourist Information Centres and in other outlets around the valley.