

## Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> January “From Otter to Peak” with Ross Hussey

On a still, grey winter morning with the Otter Valley shrouded in mist, eleven walkers met on the Green at Otterton. Our walk leader Ross explained that the footpath at Chockenhole lane was so muddy, due to the recent rain, that it was not passable and that he had been forced to re-plan the route at the last minute.

Our revised route took us southward, beside the river Otter, towards white bridge and we soon saw evidence that the beavers had been at work there recently. A little further down we stopped to watch a dipper who was perched on a branch of a fallen tree, there was a striking contrast between the white bib and the darker feathers as it bobbed up and down searching for food. Then a little further on we stopped and watched in astonishment as two swans walked towards us on the footpath. They got very close to us before stepping sideways to the river and then flying away.





We joined the coast path at White bridge and started a slow steady ascent. When we reached Otter point, one of our group told us that we were almost on top of a possible Roman villa. A single piece of tile had been found on the path in 1988. The excavations carried out in 1989 produced evidence of at least two buildings, an oven and evidence of land management, but lack of funding meant that the excavation work could not continue.

Just before we stopped for a welcome cup of coffee, we noticed a group of 30 or so small brown birds who took off into the air as we approached, we thought they may be meadow pipits, but I have since been told that linnets also frequent that particular spot. We noticed that the sea was as still as the air and with the low-lying mist the landscape appeared to be almost mystical.



The group grew gradually quieter as we climbed the hill approaching Brandy Head. We paused for a moment in the WWII observation hut, speculating as to what it might look like once the planned renovation was completed. We learned that as well as being used to test new aircraft-mounted cannon and gun sights, Home Down to the east provided an emergency landing strip for RAF aircraft which was served by its own fire tender.

We continued along the path towards high peak, as we got closer it was evident that the mist would have obscured any view from the top and that the original walk would be better enjoyed, at a later date, on a clearer day.



We turned left off of the coast past and headed towards Stantyway farm, this was the muddiest part of the walk and once we were on the road walking down the hill towards Otterton village, we looked for puddles deep enough to clean our boots in.

Once back at the Green we thanked Ross for leading us on such an interesting and varied walk.

Linda Lowes