

Thursday, September 15th “An Exetuary Walk” with Jon Roseway

On arrival at the start I was informed that this was the 1250th OVA walk and there would be free cake to celebrate this milestone. If only I'd put that in the walk description then I might have got a better turnout! No matter, the four of us still managed to demolish the cake, which was delicious - thanks go to Jane C.

We headed off on a footpath across the Exminster Marshes nature reserve, which is managed by the RSPB. The reserve is low-lying and would return to its original state as part of the Exe estuary if it weren't for the barrier created by the Exeter Ship Canal. Birds and other wildlife are encouraged by careful timing of cattle grazing on the water meadows and extensive beds of tall reeds. In places, the reeds had flopped over onto the path and it gave us that feeling of being explorers hacking our way through virgin territory. However, this impression was frequently disturbed by the deafening noise of GWR trains pounding past us just a few yards away.

Arriving at the Turf Inn, it was tempting to stop for coffee, but we pushed on along the estuary embankment. The plan for the coffee stop was to sit on the sea wall and observe the wading birds out on the mud-flats, but there was a surprisingly chilly onshore breeze blowing, so we decided to seek shelter in St Clement's churchyard.



From the church, we followed the boundary of Powderham deer park inland. The road then runs parallel to the Old Plantation and gives a great view of the Belvedere. This 18th century, three-sided brick tower was not only an excellent vantage point for observing shipping on the River Exe, it also served the Earls of Devonshire as a ballroom. I'd rather have walked on tracks through the Old Plantation, but we would have had to pay for the privilege. Pressing on along lanes through farmland, we stopped for lunch in the corner of a pasture close to Exminster golf course. In fact, we were near enough to hear the exasperated comments of the players as they fluffed their shots! The four of us fitted nicely onto an old wooden pallet that was lying around and made a cosy place to sit as we enjoyed our food and commanding views of the estuary.



There wasn't far to go after lunch – into Exminster, across the main road, some short footpaths through the nature reserve and back to the cars.

Jon Roseway