

## Friday, 10<sup>th</sup> November “Sid Valley Ring (west half)” with Penny and Paul Kurowski

The 'Sid Valley Ring' route, created by Sidmouth Town Council and the Sid Vale Association using existing footpaths around the town, was officially opened on Saturday, September 21, 2019 to mark the start of Sidmouth Walking Festival.

Nine of us met opposite the Church of St Peter and St Giles in Sidbury for the first half of the Sid Valley Ring. The early morning rain had cleared and we had glorious sunshine affording us wonderful views across the countryside.

We didn't have time to review the many listed buildings in the ancient village of Sidbury - there is an iron age fort at Castle Hill overlooking the village and Sidbury is mentioned in the Domesday Book. We followed the path through wet, muddy fields - in one sloping field we spent some time looking at the various waxcaps and other fungi.

We arrived at White Cross with views of Ottery St. Mary and Dartmoor but decided that the cold wind in this shady area was not the place for the coffee stop. The walk continued through woodlands. A meeting of ways at Hollow Head Cross on arriving at Fire Beacon Nature Reserve - we found the perfect spot for coffee: bathed in sunshine with more extensive views across the Devon countryside.



Coming down from Fire Beacon, we walked through woodlands with damp duckboards, crossed a boggy field with a stile at each end (a rarity nowadays!) to walk down Core Hill Lane - the old road from Sidmouth to Ottery St. Mary. Crossing near Waitrose, we headed down into Bulverton - at the time of William the Conqueror, the hamlet formed part of the extensive Otterton Manor lands. We looked at the Grade II listed, 2-storey thatched cottages in The Square, near Ice House Lane, which dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

We crossed the B3176, to climb up Bickwell Lane with good views across the valley looking back to our route from Fire Beacon. We soon arrived in Bickwell Valley and stopped by an Edward VII letterbox - about 300 Edward VII post boxes were made, of which 150 survive (there is another at

The Maer, Exmouth). We admired the impressive collection of fine detached houses in large gardens built after the construction of the road in 1900. The success of the Bickwell Valley scheme was very much down to the close working relationship between the Manor Estates (as landowners), Robert Sampson (architect) and Skinners (builders). The Skinners building business was set up in the 1880's between 2 brothers - John Jennings Skinner and Richard Wyatt Skinner. It was initially decided to build three houses to demonstrate to future purchasers the type of development which would take place in the Valley. Skinners were the builders of all three and eventually built all of the original houses in the Valley. To buy a house in Bickwell Valley now would set you back more than £1 million.

We entered The Goyle - the "secret garden" sits in former Victorian parkland and was once home to many beautiful plants and trees but had become neglected and overgrown. The Friends of Glen Goyle (FOGG) was set up in 2021 to look after the site and explore its heritage, beginning work in June 2022 the FOGG has created a walk beside a stream with interesting plants. One of the first plantings by the FOGG was a *Crinodendron hookerianum*, or Chilean Lantern Tree which is used as the logo of the FOGG.

We passed The Royal Glen Hotel - this fine Grade I listed hotel was the former residence of the Duke of Kent, father of Queen Victoria, and was then called Woolbrook Glen. The Duke of Kent died here. The crenelated parapet was different from the other nearby hotels.

We arrived at Sidmouth Esplanade after 6.7 miles in time for lunch - some had their lunch with them, others went to a fish and chip shop and we went to a café.

Paul Kurowski