

Report of Chelmsford's U3A Travel Club walking holiday in Limpley Stoke, near Bath 13th – 17th April 2015



20 Travel Group members made their way by train or car to The Best Western Hotel in Limpley Stoke for a 4 day walking holiday. This had been arranged for us by Sue and Graham Robinson, who trade as Bath and West Country Walks and offer a variety of guided and self-guided walking holidays in the West Country, Austria and Cyprus.

We sipped our welcome drinks on the first evening, as Graham outlined the four walks that we would undertake, each of which would be 6-8 miles in length. Graham dined with us the first evening as we happily made our way through three excellent courses.

The first walk on Tuesday 14th April started a mile or so from the hotel at the Brassknocker Visitor Centre next to the Dundas Aqueduct on the Somerset Coal Canal. This Aqueduct constructed during the 18th Century canal boom is now home to a marina providing facilities for cycle and boat hire. The first part of the walk along the Kennet and Avon Canal towards the village of Bathampton was very pleasant, but not demanding – a nice, gentle introduction for us. Then we encountered the first of many “undulations,” which stretched us a bit! We had our first day’s lunch on a hillside overlooking Bathampton, the River Avon Canal and the Bath to Southampton railway with the city of Bath visible in the distance. Off we then went through the woods, along the crest of the ridge past Brown’s Folly before gradually descending back towards the canal. It ended up being quite a challenging first walk, and we were all pleased to get back to the visitor centre for a welcome cuppa.

Wednesday’s walk started with us meandering through green meadows to the pretty village of Freshford. We went past a mill, through fields full of happy, frolicking lambs, and into shady woods full of aromatic wild garlic. We saw Iford Manor with its Peto-designed Italianate garden and peered over Cotswold stone walls towards the village of Westwood. Shortly after it was time for our picnic lunch sitting on a hillside overlooking Bradford on Avon and the Kennet and Avon Canal. We were delighted to find that the remainder of the walk was along the canal path and therefore flat!

Thursday saw us drive to Shearwater Lake on the Longleat Estate. Our walk started around the lake from which we plunged into conifer forest. We emerged into pastureland with views of the Deverills, the Wiltshire Downs and a ‘white horse’ carved into the hillside. This walk was a lot more level than the previous two, but instead we had to overcome fallen trees and boggy tracks which hindered our progress towards the welcoming tea room.

On the final day (Friday) those who had come by train took a taxi back into Bath, while the rest of us headed east to the delightful National Trust village of Lacock, with its period Cotswold stone houses, pubs and abbey, which have featured in costume dramas such as Cranford, and Pride and Prejudice. This was a most enjoyable week in a lovely part of England, with excellent company, good food – and the sun shone!

Clare Lyne