

Walking The Coleridge Way

For the past three or four years my friend Graham and I have done late Autumn walks in the UK. We have been lucky with dry weather until this year. We had two dry days, three days with showers and one day of virtually constant rain and wind.

We set out from Nether Stowey from Coleridge's Cottage. Just after lunch we arrived at Alfoxton Hall, where William Wordsworth and his sister had once lived. It had lain neglected for many years until it was bought at auction by a benefactor on behalf of a Buddhist community. The group raised the additional restoration funds through crowd-funding and have now started on the renovation to convert it to a Retreat and Meditation Centre. There are currently 17 people living there.

On Day two, after 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles of walking through rolling farm land we arrived at Monksilver where we took shelter from the rain in the vestry of the Church of All Saints in Monksilver. The church was the venue for the 1583 marriage of Sir Francis Drake to his second wife, Elizabeth Sydenham. The church was built in the 12th Century and is a Grade 1 listed building. After lunch we had a steep climb of 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles followed by a gentle descent to the charming hamlet of Roadwater.

Day three took us to Luxborough with several climbs and a long descent to our lunch stop. This area has been habited since late Stone Age with many recovered items on display at Taunton Museum. The afternoon section started with a short steep ascent followed shortly after with a longer climb out onto moorland. The afternoon section ended with a slippery section on exposed bedrock.

The weather forecast for Day four was for a day of rain, wind and a drop in temperature. The forecast, unfortunately, was 100% accurate. We had a miserable day, took a couple of wrong turns, crossed three streams where the stepping stones were partially submerged, encountered a fox hunt with horses, dogs and quad bikes and encountered the worst path which went for well over a mile with loose stones on the surface and jagged stones embedded in the path. It did take us out at a pleasant view point at Webber's Post where we found a tree trunk to have our lunch stop. The afternoon brought more rain. On a better day we would have diverted to go to the viewpoint at Dunkery Beacon which at 519 metres is the highest point on Exmoor.

We decided that on Day Five we would ignore the first half of that day's route and just do the easier second half. It was the right decision as we were able to enjoy a shorter day From Ash Farm to Oare. Ash Farm is where Coleridge wrote Kubla Khan. Shortly after Ash Farm we came across a young guy rebuilding a stone wall. He was leaving the next day to go to New Zealand for 4 months to shear sheep. The day finished with a glorious descent into Oare through bracken and with wonderful views over the valley.

Our final day took us from Oare to Lynmouth. It was the easiest day only complicated by us having to take a diversion to avoid an area where the path was flooded from the previous days' rain. In the morning we had a mixture of woodland and farm land with gentle and steep scents. The afternoon was easy walking finishing with a walk along the East Lyn river into Lynmouth. The trail ends in Lynmouth but we thought it only right to take the funicular up to Lynton and walk a bit of the South West Coast Path along to the Valley of the Rocks before returning to Lynmouth for an explore and a well deserved beer.

I can recommend this walk and believe it can be done throughout the year. It has a wide range of terrain and landscapes, heath land , moorland, beech, silver birch and oak woods, riverside walking, challenging climbs and some wonderful views including over to the Gower Peninsula. The Coleridge Way is 51miles in length and can be done comfortably in six days of walking. Those who stayed at HF's Selworthy House will no doubt have happy memories of walking in this part of Somerset. We were based in Dunster and the hotel took us to the start each day after leaving our car at the end point for that day. We found that convenient and certainly required less planning than if we had stayed in different places along the route.