

BUMS walk report – Friday 29th March 2019

Location: Snailbeach, Shropshire

Weather: Dry, sunny and warm for March

Party: Lesley, (leader), Mike A, Tony, Lynn, Ann, Jeff, Debbie, Sue Jones (new member), Mark, Heather and John, Chrissie, Amanda, Phil and Lynn (guests), Dogs: Spot, Elly, Riley and Harvey (new member).

Nearly attended: Cate and Sue L

Distance: 9.3 miles

We don't usually record 'nearly attendees' but in this case it is worth a mention. Sue had to withdraw the night before due to her husband, Ian, needing to be busted out of the Countess, and poor Cate had a car issue in the pavilion car park.

With all of us looking on it soon became apparent that her boot was not going to open up and let her rucksack and boots out. No siree, it wouldn't budge, despite Tony trying to cast a magic spell over it and Mark fiddling around inside, it remained closed.

Cate had to be abandoned.

The rest of us, 15, found our way via the A49 to Snailbeach which lies adjacent to the village of Stiperstones.

In fact we had used this car park, complete with toilets and an honesty box, before on Jeff's Stiperstones walk, but this route would hardly cross any of that one.

After all the dogs had been put on leads, toilet trips made and boots put on we were off. With three new people there was much getting to know one another as we tromped up towards Lordshill through the lead mine heritage centre. More of this later.

Leaving the road we walked east towards the delightful village of Habberley. Then it was off to the south towards Lower Vessons. The guide book (Shropshire and Staffordshire-Outstanding Circular Walks, Ordnance Survey) became slightly vague at this point which involved a bit of mincing, if not faffing, till we found the right way. We stopped here for coffee, in a not too comfortable field.

Once we got the right line we cut through woods (there was a bit of mud here) and continued through some lovely old woodland to emerge at the foothills of the middle of the Stiperstones, in fact, Oak Hill.

Here we were tempted to stop for lunch but I persuaded everyone to carry on to the Stiperstones hills where we would have better views. Several of the party had refrained from taking sustenance during the morning break (don't think they'll risk that again), and were feigning hunger but we pressed on for another half hour or so to reach the top where we soon found soft ground to take lunch. I should mention that the day had really warmed up and most were in short sleeves, not bad for March.

We were all sorry to leave this lovely spot but we needed to be on our way and followed the main Stiperstones path down towards The Hollies. This is an AONB (area of outstanding natural beauty), and you can see why. There are ancient holly trees here, some over 300 years old. They were a managed crop in Victorian times, used as fodder by miner-farmers, as the upper leaves don't have prickles on them so are edible by cattle. There were also old restored cottages here where the miner-farmers dwelt.

As we descended towards the huge chimney, we paused to view Crowsnest Dingle, a deep valley at the end of the Stiperstones range.

Our return took us right through all the mine buildings, including the chimney, the powerhouse and processing buildings. Snailbeach and District Railway opened in 1877 taking ores from Shropshire's largest mine to Pontesbury and the 2ft 3 ¾ inch gauge railway line which took the mineral barytes (used in the chemical and medical industry) is still visible, being operational till 1959.

Tony was in his element!

A very pleasant walk, with new people and a new dog, culminated in a garden setting for rehydration at the Dysart, with Cate finally able to join us. Apparently a burly man at BMW swung hard on the boot releasing the catch to find Cate had inadvertently trapped the handle of her boot bag round the mechanism. At least it wasn't that beautiful sport car's fault.

All's well that ends well as Sue managed to spring Ian from hospital and he is fully recovered.