

Location: Dovedale, Manifold Valley, Derbyshire, Saturday 15th June 2019
Weather: Grey skies, drizzle and light rain
Party: Jeff (Leader), Mike A, Jim, Colin
Distance: Distance: 11.2 miles
Ascent: 1700 feet (OS website reading), Satmaps anything up to 2970 feet

A low turnout meant the party could all fit in one car and we departed from the pavilion at 8.00 am for the one and a half hour drive to the car park in Alstonefield. Once safely out of the car park and village (no mean feat as other leaders will be aware) we headed south east and down a steep path to the Dove Valley at Milldale Bridge, and then over the ancient packhorse bridge, allegedly the most famous of all in the Peak District. It is known as the Viator's Bridge, and was made famous in the English classic *The Compleat Angler* by Izaak Walton. The route then took us along the Dove Valley for a couple of miles past Ilam Rock and various caves, although the weather did not inspire much sightseeing. Fortunately the river appeared to be more or less at its normal level despite the days of heavy rain beforehand.

At the famous stepping stones where Lin Dale joins Dove Dale we diverted to climb Thorpe Cloud for a coffee break. This is another outlying limestone hill or reef knoll in the style of Chrome Hill. Due to a navigational glitch the correct contouring path to the top was missed and the group were encouraged to take the direct route up the side of the hill. Fortunately there was a break in the general dampness at the top while we were drinking our coffee. After the break we walked on towards Ilam Country Park (National Trust), but were forced to a stop trying to cross the river near Izaak Walton Hotel by sheer numbers of children from what must have been a very large coach. Heading across Ilam Park we lost the coach parties and regained the River Dove and then climbed up out of the dale by Castern Hall to the top of Castern Wood Nature Reserve. There was a good view of the Manifold Valley from the top where a bench able to fit the whole party had been thoughtfully provided for our lunch stop. Unaccountably, the group refused to believe this was anything to do with good planning but merely an Act of God.

According to Staffs Wildlife Trust, the reserve “— — is a diverse site of broadleaf woodland, scrub and grassland. The shallow, limestone rich soils support a wide range of plants and over 240 species have been recorded. The spring flowering cowslips and violets are followed later in the year by several species of orchids, small scabious, ladies mantle and the aromatic salad burnet. The old spoil heaps are home to a number of uncommon species and are covered with wild thyme and the delicate white flowers of limestone bedstraw in mid-summer.” We did manage to identify some grass.

The path continued on at the top of the nature reserve through long wet grass with muddy intervals. Colin was very grateful for this as he was trying out his nice clean new walking shoes, which did seem to work very well although he subsequently admitted to cheating by wearing waterproof socks.

Continuing across Larkstone Lane we arrived at Wetton where we turned eastwards for the final couple of kilometres back to the car park at Alstonefield where we set off for the return trip to the Dysart for the usual rehydration. We had clearly been very lucky as the heavens opened within about ten minutes of setting off, making for a very wet drive home

Jeff