

Event: BUMS Christmas Family Walk December 2019
Location: Ellesmere, Shropshire, Sunday 29th December 2019
Weather: Mostly sunshine and a light breeze.
Party: **Homo sapiens:** Debbie and Jeff (Leaders), Mike and Lesley, Tony and Lynn, Jim, Mike H, Cate and Greg, Ray, Philip and Lynn with Domenic, Sue, Heather, Chrissie, Ian, Steve and Sarah, Andrea, Mark
Canis lupus familiaris: Ellie and Spot, Flora, Bobby
Distance: 9.5 miles
Ascent: 415 feet (OS website readings)

A late start of 10 a.m. from the pavilion gave BUMS members a chance of sleeping off some of the effects of Christmas, and on the dot 22 rather clean looking participants turned up and piled into cars for the short drive to downtown Ellesmere. Expectations were raised by the appearance of sunshine and relatively benign temperatures. Certain comments were made about the scenery at the Ellesmere Cross Street car park, something to do with the T & G warehouse alongside, but spirits improved as we left the town and walked round the Mere itself. This was fairly busy with dog walkers and BUMS suffered an early casualty as Mike A's feet were taken from under him by an unruly hound. The dog's owner was similarly unruly and offered no apology. BUMS hounds were of course on best behaviour. Fortunately Mike was reasonably undamaged and the walk proceeded to quieter footpaths heading east across the fields.

This stretch was one of the muddier parts of the walk and a fair amount of slipping and sliding was in evidence, before the highest point on the walk was reached at a trig point (123 metres). More fields and woods continued to lead east to the village of Welshampton followed by increasingly open fields leading to Rowe Farm where we turned south to the welsh canal at Hampton Bank. A picnic table and bench on the canal embankment here meant that most of the party had a comfortable coffee/lunch stop enjoying the sunshine and view.

The walk now ran along the canal towpath towards the meres. Unfortunately some sections of the towpath were as muddy as the fields and thus offered further opportunities for slipping and sliding, and three members stayed on the towpath rather than do the diversion around Cole Mere with the possibility of even worse conditions underfoot. This is a glacial feature with Site of Special Scientific Interest status, and the only place in England where the Least Water-Lily can be found. A car park here meant lots of walkers and dogs, but no unruly ones this time. After Cole Mere we returned to the towpath and walked along past Blake Mere before walking through the 87 yard Ellesmere canal tunnel. Flora seemed keen to leave the party at this point but a judicious blast of the whistle brought her back in line. A short final towpath section led to the branch canal into Ellesmere itself and the car park.

A rather less clean group returned eagerly to the Dysart for bacon butties, chips and mince pies, with appropriate rehydration of course, bringing a pleasant end to the day.

Happy New Year to all!

Jeff and Debbie