

Trip Report: The Christmas Family Walk

Date: 28th December 2013

Group: : Lesley and Mike Arrowsmith (Leader and Navigator), Green family x 3, Bodfish family x 4, O'Neill family x 3, Wakefield family x 4, Foster family x 4, Tony and Lynn Quinn, Colin, Jim G, Mike H, Sue Lancaster, Ian, Caryle, Frank

Route: Parkgate and the Wirral Way

Total Distance: Unknown

Total Ascent: Unknown

Weather: Unknown

Following the success of last year's family walk it was decided to incorporate a wheelchair- friendly section into this year's ramble, ensuring that Jenny would be able to participate; an easy sentence to write but a tricky undertaking as I was about to find out. Settling on a local walk around Parkgate and Neston was also a good idea as the winter weather can have disastrous consequences for a well-attended walk (remember Moel Famau?).

The proposed walk was a combination of a walk in 'Adventurous pub walks in Cheshire' and 'All terrain pushchair walks- Cheshire'. (Lynda- I think it is about time you did some research on longer wheelchair friendly local walks as there is a definite gap in the market).

As usual the attendees was an ever moving feast but it turned out that 29 walkers assembled in the northern most car park in Parkgate, including three very well behaved dogs. The main thing to note is that Frank made a cameo appearance- his first 2013 walk! We also were joined by serial family walkers, the Green's. Jack was only about 5 or 6 when he came on the first Family Walk and he is still coming along. There could be a new BUMs recruit in the making there. Other notable attendees were Shirley and daughter as well as the full complement of Bodfish's.

Back to the car park. This is where I - as self- declared family walk organiser, handed over the navigational leadership to Mike A. He loves doing this so I am doing him a favour really. This left me able to ensure that everyone was enjoying themselves.

Leaving the car park we soon met the Wirral Way, developed after 1962 from an old railway track bed. Several hundred years ago this area housed busy ports and you can still see some of the old quays jutting out into the marsh lands. When the silt finally took over the shipping business moved to the Mersey.

It soon became apparent that I had forgotten to ensure there were toilet facilities at the start. Several of the party became quite agitated

when they discovered there was no planned toilet stop. Of course panic spread like wildfire and myself and my navigator hatched a plan to divert the walk to incorporate the public conveniences in the centre of Parkgate.....well, the best laid plans. It transpired, following quite a substantial deviation, that the toilets were closed. Panic now hit several of the group. However, the leader in true leadership style, putting the members of the group first, simply barged into the nearby pub and the group formed an orderly queue. Bladders relieved we had to say farewell to Jenny, Brian, Jake and Lynda as the path now became too narrow for Jenny. This was somewhat disappointing as they had only been able to share the walk for a short time. Blame it on the toilet issue or just a lack of reconnaissance but next year I promise to do better (Linda—help please!).

The rest of the party ploughed on through thick, moist, deep mud, along the coastal path towards the Harp Inn, situated on the very visible Denhall Quay. Here we stopped for an early lunch, sitting on the quayside. This quay was where boats took coal, mined from nearby collieries, across to Ireland and The Isle of Man. We were all on the lookout for a glimpse of the 'uncommon water pipit'. There were plenty of twitchers with long lenses on the lookout too. Suffice it to say no one on our party spotted it (though actually I don't think any of us knew what it looked like anyway). A road stretch took us past the gates of Ness Botanic Gardens and eventually we left a narrow and somewhat hazardous road to turn left and walk back along The Wirral Way into and right through the market town of Neston.

The walk was tracked by three Satmap GPSs but each one disagreed on the total length. (Gentlemen, please get this sorted for the next walk). Total ascent was negligible and in the end we settled on total mileage being around 9 miles, 2.5 for the shorter walk. Faffing time was quite a lot! We returned to Bunbury at 3.30pm.

Enjoyed by all who walked and also by a further 2 non-walkers who joined us for the traditional chip butties provided by the Yew Tree, the Family Walk continues to be an annual tradition in the BUMs calendar.

Stand by everyone for the classic year of 2014. New members always welcome!

Lesley