

Trip Report: Shropshire**Date:** 29th March 2024**Group:** Jim (Leader), Bob, David Bond, Christine, Neil, Ann, Dave Barker, Tony + Ponya**Route:** Caer Caradoc & The Lawley**Total Distance:** 12.6 miles**Total Ascent:** 2528 ft**Weather:** Dry with sunny intervals, one sharp shower

Ponya was a last-minute addition, causing a juggling of drivers, departure was sharp at 8 o'clock from the Pavilion. Despite the usual tales of Bank Holiday traffic chaos the drive down to Church Stretton was just over an hour with the roads surprisingly quiet considering it was Good Friday.

The original plan involved parking at the Co-op in Church Stretton but David Bond had a wizzo idea to use his National Trust passes to get us free parking at Carding Mill. He gave the leader assurance that this would only add a couple of hundred yards to the walk, not the two miles it turned out to be! Still on the bright side we did save £9.60 for the parking charges at the Co-op! (Tony was especially made up).

So, starting from Carding Mill we walk down and through Church Stretton, past the railway station before crossing the busier A49, up a couple of narrow lanes and onto the first quagmire of the day, a very wet and muddy field, a taster for things to come.

Crossing a small footbridge, we start the long steep climb, passing Three Fingers Rock, to the summit of Caer Caradoc Hill (459m). The weather is a beautiful sunny spring day and we are treated to extensive views all around, and looking at the rain showers, but thankfully they were passing way to the south of us. Tony is already starting to call for a coffee stop (Lesley would have been proud of him) the Leader rebuffs these calls until shelter from the wind is found as we start our descent towards Little Caradoc.

Suitably refreshed we continue the descent towards the village of Comley where two of our number decide to go AWOL! Line of sight rules are in force but Dave Barker fails to enforce this and so Neil and Tony wander off on their own. The Leader, some way ahead, looks back across the boggy field wondering why the squad have stopped and they also seem to be milling about aimlessly. It turns out that Neil & Ann share iPhone tracking (mainly so that Ann can find Neil when he falls off his bike!) and Neil appears just before the main squad emerges at Comley Farm.

A fair bit of muttering and recriminations are heard but the Leader is unfazed by the mild insurrection in the ranks.

Full squad reunited, the next task is the long steep pull up to the summit of The Lawley (377m) where we are again treated to magnificent views all around. We reach the end of the ridge which is festooned with an assortment of mobile phone antennae, ugly but resulting in very good 4G reception!. We descend off the end of the ridge and find a suitable lunch stop, enjoying the lovely warm spring sunshine. When Christine has finished her six-course lunch, we start the march back towards Church Stretton.

The route back is along the foot of the western edge of The Lawley, along an undulating track, that is very muddy and numerous detours are necessary to avoid the worst of this and a few small lakes. Fairly uneventful, we arrive back at the village of Comley where, passing the end of our earlier descent route off of Caer Caradoc, we encounter our only rain of the day, a short sharp shower that requires the donning of waterproofs, but only for 10 minutes. We then join another very muddy footpath skirting along the west side of Caer Caradoc. The path becomes a little vague and the Leader makes his first, and only, navigation error of the day. We pass a house and take the wrong path and arrive at a dead-end corner of a field protected by a barb wire fence without a stile in sight. Lots of muttering and milling about results in each Bum finding their own solution to get back on the correct route. David Bond's patented pipe insulation barb wire crossing tool is deployed. Tony is having his own personal melt down having stripped Ponya of her warm coat/harness (he has not explained why) he spends about 20 minutes trying to put it back on her. He fails miserably and as the squad are getting impatient with his faffing about he gives up and Ponya has the embarrassment of completing the rest of the walk naked!

We continue onwards with no more dramas, passing the railway station and the Co-op car park (further mutterings about the extra distance to David's car park) Ponya and several walking poles are washed in the river before we head for home.

An uneventful drive sees us back at the Dysart at 4.30pm to be greeted by a fresh barrel of Salopian Oracle, a classic beer to celebrate a classic walk.

Jim