

# Trip Report

Wincle Minn, 17<sup>th</sup> March 2023

Distance: 9.5 miles advertised, 9.93 miles according to Strava

Ascent: 1,390ft advertised, 1,300ft According to Strava

Human Participants: Richard (Leader), Sarah Hammond, Colin Christie, Dave and Chris Bond, Dave French, Neil and Ann Bodfish, Jim Grant, Iain and Sue Mc Neil

Canine Participants: Pippa (sensibly walked 9.93 miles, obviously has no Spaniel genes)

This walk was originally programmed for Saturday but as I play trains on Saturday it had to be moved. Mothering Sunday didn't seem like such a good idea as people might be otherwise engaged so it was decided to move it to the Friday. I also suggested an earlier start to try and avoid the worst of the forecast rain due at 15:00hrs that afternoon. The plan worked as it completely prevented any rain for the whole walk, result!

A prompt 08:15 start was made from Bunbury for the journey to Rushton Spencer and everyone found the parking place which was a good start. Booting up and dressing over we set off at 09:30 with a short walk to the main road which we crossed and picked up pleasant paths through fields heading towards the River Dane. It soon became apparent that there was a lot more water than anticipated. The fields were definitely on the soggy side, not surprising really as they were covered in snow earlier in the week. We soon began a descent to the Dane valley and picked up a flat lane alongside the Rudyard Lake Conduit. The conduit was built to supply water to Rudyard Reservoir which acted as a feeder to the Caldon Canal which runs south of Leek into the Potteries. The conduit, which is rather like a canal, takes water from the River Dane and it was not long before we passed a remote cottage at Hammonds Hole (no relation) and soon after arrived at Gig Hall where a coffee stop was taken next to a small waterfall close to the start of the conduit.

After coffee we crossed the river and climbed out of the valley and began to head over to another valley which carries Shell Brook south to meet the Dane. Following the eastern edge of the valley we headed north to Nettlebeds. Fortunately Nettlebeds had been incorrectly named which was a great relief to everyone as no nettles were harmed in the making of this walk. From here we descended into Shell Brook valley or as we now know it The Land of Confusion! Not only was the leader confused but also his trusty sidekick. There was a path, a footbridge over the brook but it appeared to be going the wrong way. Was it the OS that was wrong? Was it the GPS that was wrong? After some fruitless backtracking uphill the leader was forced to admit defeat (along with his assistant) and we crossed the footbridge for a second time and tried to follow the stream in the valley floor which soon proved impassable and we thus resigned ourselves to following the path in the "wrong direction". It soon became apparent that the wrong direction was actually the right direction so the leader reset his inbuilt navigation system and normal service was resumed. The pleasant woodland path snaked its way northwards to Greasley Hollow crossing the brook as it went. Greasley Hollow actually had been misspelt, it should be Greasy Hollow

judging by the amount of low friction mud we were trudging through. Dave French was the first victim of gravity soon after crossing the stream but not the last. Apparently there were some mutterings in the ranks but nothing that the leader could hear.

Crossing the stream again we began a long climb up towards Nab Hill mercifully with no mud, well not until the top when we were greeted by yet more mud on a freshly churned quad bike track. Escape was not long coming though and we resumed reasonable walking across fields below Winkle Minn.

By now it was time to seek a suitable lunch spot and we were fortunate to find a bank below a large tree with some shelter from the breeze courtesy of a hedge opposite.

Once all rations were consumed we set off along a level track for a while and then began the final climb to the summit of Winkle Minn and soon arrived at an excuse for a tarmac road running along the crest of the ridge. Our reward was a wide-ranging panorama over Cheshire stretching to Beeston Castle and beyond. Heading south we kept our height for a while before descending on the road to Hawkslee, a tiny hamlet where we were warned of the local "Chien Lunatique" lurking in one of the gardens by the road. Safely past we turned left off the road to head back towards Shell Brook valley.

A few fields later we slipped and slid down to the stream, Dave Bond impressing all with his dancing skills on the slime and he almost stayed upright. First aid not needed. Up the other side to a brief repatriation with our outward route which was soon left as we headed south towards Barleigh Ford Bridge where we met and crossed the River Dane again. From here we followed a different part of the conduit heading for Rushton Spence and the ground was remarkably good with no mud. This didn't seem right, I'd been forewarned by Steve Hammond that the conduit path was very treacherous and particularly muddy. The good going didn't last long and the last mile or so produced some of the highest quality mud we were privileged to experience. Fortunately, by this time we had all had enough practice at walking on zero friction surfaces and no one fell into the ever-present conduit. A final crossing of the busy main road took us across our final field to the old railway line and a short stroll back to the cars.

There were 11 pairs of very muddy boots, 11 pairs of very muddy trousers, 4 very muddy paws, 11 smiles (Pippa doesn't smile) and the forecast rain never materialized, so a good day out with good friends.

Thank you all for your company, hope your washing machines didn't get clogged up with mud!

Richard Calder