

Bewdley – June 2018 (Away Day)

Today, Sunday 24 June 2018, was the Shamblers' Away Day to Bewdley in Worcestershire. The day promised to be sunny and warm. The first minibus pick up was at 8.30am from Thrapston with a second one in Northampton at 9am. Our 14 members and friends were then off North up the M1 and M6 on our adventure. The journey was uneventful, although we did have one comfort stop, and arrived at Bewdley just after 11am.

Bewdley is a small but pretty West Midlands riverside Georgian town, built on the banks of the River Severn at the gateway of the Wyre Forest National Park. After our arrival, we had half an hour to explore the area around the river with time for refreshments before starting our walk.

When we were all gathered again at 11.45am, we set off down to the river and joined the path where the road bridge crosses – this was built by Thomas Telford in 1798. The walk was to follow the bank of the river for four miles to the hamlet of Upper Arley. Here at the Harbour Inn would be lunch and then we would return to Bewdley by Steam Train. The Seven Valley Railway, which is a Heritage Railway running between Kidderminster and Bridgenorth, runs parallel to the river on the opposite bank to our walk, and during the Summer runs a reasonable service.

Although it was still early, the riverside pubs and restaurants were already busy. The park, which on our earlier reconnoitre in April had been quiet, now thronged with stalls and side shows of a Fete. Free bacon butties supplied by a local organic butcher were thrust into our hands - we were a bit peckish by then. What a kind and friendly gesture to set us on our way.



With the bustle of the Fete behind us, an asphalt path took us away from the town and soon all we could hear was the sound of the river and the call of a Song Thrush in the trees. The river was wide and slow flowing, unlike our previous visit earlier in the year when it was a powerful torrent. The banks are lined with Alder and Willow trees and it is only through breaks in the foliage can the river be seen.

The path now became compacted soil, more akin to what we are used to walking on. To either side were the blue flowers of wild Geraniums interspersed with the flat white umbels of Cow Parsley standing chest high. Uncut hay meadows yellow with Buttercups stretched up to the tree line a field away. The route was flat and easy and with the sun warm on our backs and we walked in Indian style along our designated track, which alternated through open countryside and under the shade of the Riverside Alders.



A canoe club was setting off on the other bank, their voices echoing across the water and their discussion as to what was in their pack up lunch reminded us of our destination ahead, namely The Harbour Inn. The railway line on the opposite bank used to cross over the river where the sturdy concrete supporting columns of the now defunct branch line used to cross the river to Tenby. Stranded mid-stream the concrete arms reach skywards with nothing to hold.

The next bridge across was the Victoria Bridge, another Telford construction and the present crossing for the railway line.





Just as we were about to pass underneath, the tooting of the steam train could be heard as it passed overhead. A long stretch of the path passed through an Ash and Oak wood, protecting us from the heat of the mid-day sun as we approached our destination. Several small fallen trees strewed across the track but were easily climbed over or under.

Upper Arley and the Harbour Inn were on the horizon.



Tables had been booked in advance for our meal so we were soon seated and our orders taken.



At 3pm we left the pub and ascended the steep hill to Upper Arley Station, just two hundred yards away. Tickets were purchased for the short return to Bewdley.



Although the train was late, a dog on the track apparently, within fifteen minutes we were back at our start.

Our bus was waiting but we just had time to consume an ice-cream before boarding again and departing back to Northamptonshire.

Everyone was happy and agreed it was a great day out.