

Carsington Water, Derbyshire – September 2020 (Away Day)

Our annual Away Day was due to be held in June but, due to the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, we had to move it to September but still being careful regarding how it was run. A considerable amount of organisation was needed to ensure it would be an enjoyable and safe event. Our walk leader, Finbarr Finn, had plenty of hand wipes and sanitation liquid available if required.

It was inevitable that most people had an early start in order to travel to Derbyshire in time to start the walk at 10am. Normally, we would have provided a bus to take us collectively to our destination but, again, due to the restrictions we had to use our own transport. Some of our members took the opportunity for a weekend away, so had stayed locally.

Carsington Water is the ninth largest Reservoir in the country, holding 7800 million gallons of water with a surface area of 700 football pitches. Construction was started in 1979 and finished after a number of delays in 1992. It is kept replenished by the River Derwent. The Visitor Centre has a café and rental facilities for bikes and kayaks.



Sixteen eager walkers assembled outside the Visitor Centre on this rather cloudy and chilly morning, although the sun did appear later on. We were not the only activity taking part. A cycle rally was underway in an adjacent park and a cross country running event was seeing the return of the first runners back to the centre. Neither proved to be a hindrance to our walk.



The normal signing in and a short speech by Finbarr regarding distancing and hand sanitising took place before we set off. Derbyshire has quite a few hills, unlike our native Northamptonshire, so our initial exit from the carpark was a steep climb to make us remember where we were. The track was dry but the grooving and erosion in the path showed that at times it could be a downhill torrent.

Crossing over a busy minor road, with due diligence, we entered a small caravan park. Even though we were relatively late starting our walk, few of the Campers were up and about. A small flock of sheep in the next field made way for us to pass through a swing gate onto a narrow path bordered by a barbed wire fence. The hedges either side closed overhead above the path for some distance and in places required us to stoop to not get entangled in the overgrowth. At times the Squeeze Stiles were just as their name depicts – a real squeeze!



Breaking free into open fields of coarse grass, a small barn in one field was suggested as possible holiday home conversion. This was soon rejected due to the unlikely event of there being any facilities in this 'middle of nowhere' field. Diving back through another swing gate blackberry bushes and sloes were the flavour of the hedges. Although samples were taken, there was no wish to stop.



This walk had been dry under foot and on ascending a steep asphalt track the church of St Bartholomew, Hognaston village, was reached and a welcome breather taken. Hognaston is a small and pretty village with some 17th and 18th century houses with well-maintained gardens abutting onto the main road.



The descent out of the village led us to take a side track leading to a ford over the Scow Brook. Fortunately there was a foot bridge so we didn't get our feet wet. The bridge gave the opportunity for a socially distanced group photo with the friendly wooden Troll.

After this brief rest the way took us up through trees on an asphalt path that was rather steep, so we took our time here. At the top we stopped to get our breath back and to admire the views across the countryside. Here there was a memorial to John Jepson, who was a hugely influential figure in the development of Carsington Water.



The track led us back to the road and to the Dam end of the Reservoir. After the hazardous crossing of the main road we were able to stop and enjoy the splendid view over the water towards the Visitor Centre. The mile long walk along the raised reservoir retaining bank was busy with day trippers and cyclists, little did they know they were missing the peace and tranquillity this lovely walk had given us. Thanks to Finbarr and Sue Milner for finding and reccing this walk for our 2020 Away Day. Next year the Cotswolds has been suggested for a possible venue, hopefully without social distancing.



Once back at the Visitor Centre, we all went our separate way – some to return home whilst others stayed to enjoy more of the Derbyshire countryside or visit the nearby town of Ashbourne.