

SPRING SAFARI 2009

This years Spring Safari was again based on Marlborough in Wiltshire from where we explored further the Kennet and Avon Canal and other very interesting sites and scenery.

Before setting out from home I checked the weather forecast which was far from optimistic with rain being forecast for all three days. Fortunately it was wrong and we had fine weather all the time except for two extremely short spells (two or three minutes).

We were a party of nineteen which included for the first time six ladies. This departure from the normal had been the subject of some debate amongst the members but any doubts were very swiftly quelled as the group settled down and integrated immediately on meeting.



Our first meeting was for lunch on the Tuesday where we rendezvoused at the Swan Inn in Shefford, a delightful country pub nestling alongside the fast flowing river Lambourne complete with wagtails feeding from the rocks. After a superb lunch we travelled a short distance to Lambourne where we embarked on our first walk. This took us up a fairly steep path to a vantage point from where we could look back over the Lambourne valley (The valley of the Race Horse). (Well worth the climb) The rest of the going was now fairly



level with some spectacular views. Upon leaving a section of woodlands we turned a corner and there beside the track was the most charming thatched chocolate box cottage. We expected to see Hansel and Gretel emerge any minute. A little weary but well satisfied after 4¹/₂ miles we

arrived back at the cars and proceeded to Marlborough and the Castle & Ball Hotel which was to be our home for the next three nights.

Our accommodation was very good and we were very well looked after in the dining room where we enjoyed a splendid breakfast each day and an extremely good three course dinner. The first day was voted a great success and we all adjourned to our rooms for a good nights sleep (or was it to be?)

No, at one o'clock we were all awakened by the most hideous noise, the fire alarm. All the occupants of the hotel congregated in the car park, in various states of dress, to learn that it was for real as somebody had set fire to a waste bin of cardboard situated under an overhanging canopy below a bedroom of this 16th century timber framed building. Fortunately a neighbour had spotted the flames, the Fire Brigade had been called and the fire had been extinguished. You can no doubt imagine the stories at breakfast next morning.

Wednesday dawned fair and at nine o'clock sharp we all made our way to Avebury where we parked in the National Trust car park. Two walks had been organised for today one in the morning a distance of 5 miles and one in the afternoon a distance of 4 miles. Both started and finished in the car park which enabled anybody not wishing to partake in the whole day could do their own thing but join the party for lunch which had been arranged in a nearby hostelry serving excellent beer from the barrel and very fine food



The morning walk took us through an area steeped in Neolithic history. We skirted Silbury Hill, a famous landmark in the area and then on to Kennet Long Barrow where we all made the short detour up to the Barrow where we were rewarded

with magnificent views of the surrounding countryside and the chance to actually enter into the burial chamber. On then to the



Sanctuary and Overton Hill before entering Avebury and lunch



Some members of the party chose to stay in Avebury and explore the wonders of the area and visit the museum. For those who chose to walk we went through some very scenic country and a steady climb up to the foot of Windmill Hill and then a short steep climb to the top. This hill was found to be the location of an early Neolithic settlement dated to about 3700 BC. From here we ambled over undulating terrain back to Avebury, our cars and the hotel for a much deserved cup of tea, shower and rest before gathering for a well earned drink and dinner.

Thursday we drove the short distance to the medieval town of Devizes. After leaving the car park we ambled gently around the old market town savouring the atmosphere and architecture before taking the footpath down to the canal. This section of the canal is home to the famous Caen Locks a flight of some 29 locks



The 29 locks have a rise of 237 feet in 2 miles or a 1 in 44 gradient. We all marvelled at the ingenuity of the Victorians in designing such a project and speculated on the hardship endured by those who toiled with spade and wheelbarrow. Having arrived at lock

23 we crossed the canal and cut across fields ablaze with buttercups to Rowde where lunch had been organised at the Cross Keys public

house. Refreshed and over fed we made our way through fields and a large herd of cows back to the canal then a short walk to the car park. The remainder of the afternoon was free to spend as one wished.

The final dinner, during which many reminiscens were exchanged and our Chairman Cecil Pedersen thanked Paul Dunn for organising such a flawless three day Safari. As this is Pauls last Safari as organiser Cecil coupled this with his thanks for all the other events that he had masterminded. Paul replied by thanking Les best and Derek Hill for their input and help and announced that he was pleased to report that Les Best had offered to mastermind a three day Safari in 2010 and that Nigel Wallington and Derek Hill had agreed to assist.

As was said earlier this was the first time that Ladies had joined us. It was wholeheartedly agreed that it had been a tremendous success, the ladies enjoyed the experience and the men felt that their prescence had greatly enhanced the occasion.

An excellent three days and I hope that having read this brief synopsis you will be encouraged to come along next year

Derek Hill