



## Ilsington Wildlife Warden Walks

### Walks to Special places in Ilsington Parish

#### **Narracombe Wood. Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> June 2024**

This was our first Wildlife Wardens Walk in Ilsington Parish. We were very fortunate to be joined by Rob Wills and his family who have opened this wood for us to enjoy. The path is named after his daughter Kate, who sadly died in 1988, aged just 10.

We met at Ilsington Village Hall, walked through the village, down Donkeys Trott (a name I had not known) and into the wood. Rob told us a little about the history of this land. Part of the present wood had once been an orchard, part was a larch plantation for some time and another section had been planted to kale though the cows wouldn't walk down the steep valley sides so that experiment failed. Now it's a lovely wet woodland. We looked at the ferns, the undivided Harts Tongue fern, the Polypody and Hard ferns with a single division and the Lady Fern and Male fern with their two divisions. We also saw plenty of mosses and lichens on the trees and stones, and flowers along the path edge. Linda Cockerton told us about the pollution and fly monitoring that is being done on the Liverton Brook. Then we returned to Ilsington village hall for tea and cake.



#### **Old Leys Wood, 4th August 2024**

Old Leys Wood in Old Liverton is owned by Peter Cross who kindly showed us around. We began at the eastern entrance off the road between Old Liverton and Bovey Tracey. Peter and his wife bought the wood in 1995 from a Pension Fund, but before that it had been owned by Dartington Estate.

Old Leys wood was a conifer plantation covering 17.5 acres. It is fairly flat with heavy wet soils on the Bovey clay. In 1996 2.3 ha of mature conifer, Sitka and larch, were felled and replanted with broadleaf trees. One corner of the wood is very wet and in 1997 a pond was dug. It was on deep clay so there was no need to line the new pond. It filled in 2 days. In 2004 the Douglas fir was thinned and cut for timber. In 2007 many more Douglas Fir were lost due to storm damage so the remainder was

cleared. In 2010, 3500 broad leaved trees were planted at the request of the forestry commission. Much natural regeneration took place, so thinning has been needed, dead ash removed and hazel coppiced.

Peter took us around the wood showing us the different plantings, the variety of trees and the sometimes-difficult process he has had to go through with Forestry England to get permission to develop the wood. We had a go at pond dipping and caught a variety of small invertebrates.



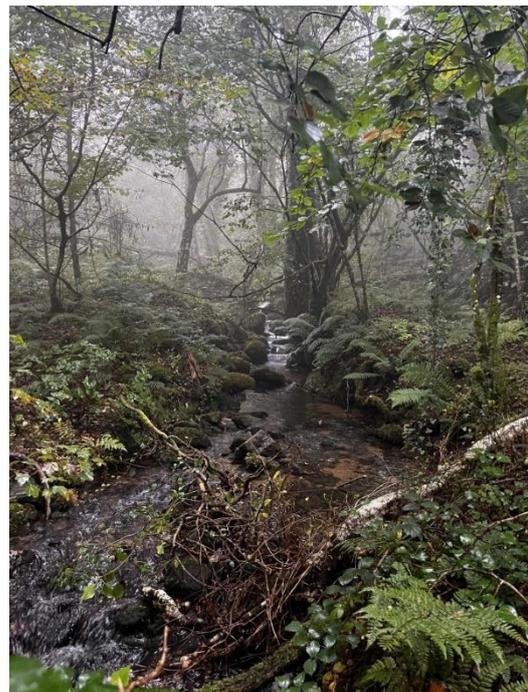
Since our walk the wood is to be passed to Small Woods and will be their centre for training in the south west. Thanks to Peter's generosity there is public access to the wood for those who want to enjoy its tranquillity.

### **Pinchaford Wood, Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2024**

With thanks to John and Rachel Heathman, Susan Coysh and Lizzie Robertson.

We met at Pinchaford Cottages which date back to the 1200's. The farm is mentioned in the Domesday book. Pinchaford Woods are old wet woodlands which have had little management. This special habitat with the River Lemon flowing through has plenty of ferns, mosses and lichens.

We first walked up the eastern bank of the Lemon clambering over boulders and ducking under trees. This side has not been managed for a long time although there were signs of previous quarrying. We stopped at a couple of trees and assessed them using the Ancient Tree Inventory. From this a tree is determined to be ancient (in the final third of its life) or veteran (not quite so old). We looked for lichens and mosses, dead branches and holes in the trees and decided they might be veteran trees, but veteran or



not they were wonderful to look at. When the path became too overgrown, we turned around, went back to the cottages, crossed the River Lemon and went up the other side.

The west side has been managed by occupants of Pinchaford Farm but still has some old trees and wet woodland. This time we were forced to turn round by the wet ground. We then walked up through the woods above the farm to see more trees covered with lichen and trees along the old stone wall.

This area is all private land and not open to the public.

### **Arrishes, Goodstone Woods, near Sigford, Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2025**

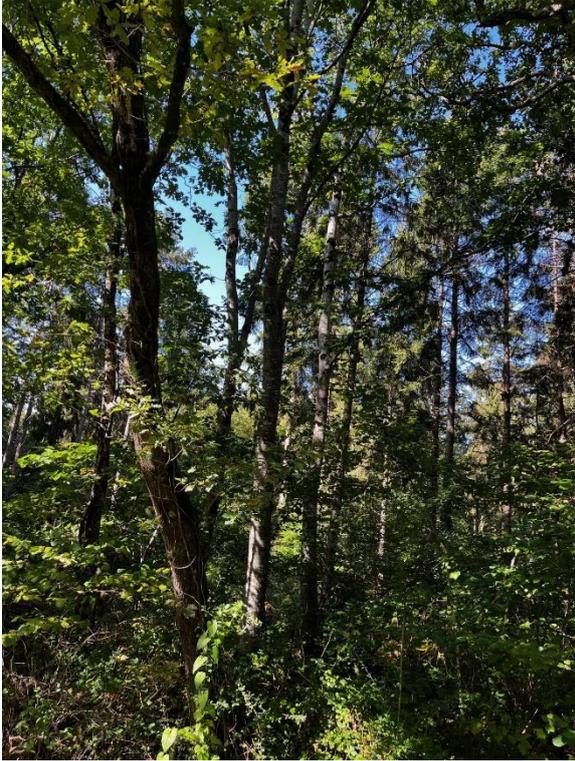
Steve Davey who owns the wood joined us. Goodstone Woods were a sitka plantation owned by the Forestry Commission. It was bought and subdivided by woodlands.co.uk. Steve bought the 5 acres of Arrishes wood in 2015 shortly after it had been replanted following felling. He has gradually taken out much of the sitka, allowed broadleaved trees to grow and planted others. He has created a diverse range of trees to allow for dieback caused by deer, squirrels and climate change. There is also a section of sweet chestnut, some of which are 100 years old. He has built 3 small ponds for wildlife and to encourage bats who feed on the insects flying above the ponds with support from Devon Wildlife Trust.



### **Great Plantation, Monday 17th February 2025**

Shaun Woodward, Community Ranger and Toby Bowen-Scott, area forester from Forestry England were our guides.

Great Plantation was once part of the Stover Estate but was sold to the Forestry Commission in the 1930s when the country needed to increase its reserve of timber. Stands of pine, spruce, douglas fir, western hemlock and larch were subsequently



planted. These are now being harvested and replanted. Looking to the future with climate change, with stormier winters and hotter drier summers, it might not be the right thing to plant with seedlings from the current trees. Seeds from the same species but sourced from trees in southern France are sometimes being used to make the forest more resilient.

Scalloped edges have been created along some of the paths so light can reach the grass at all times of day encouraging wildflowers. Although the area is a plantation, wildlife is an important part of the forest and surveys are carried out before any trees are felled. Goshawks have been seen, and we were told that they can now be seen in many woodlands across the southwest though it's not so long ago that they were quite rare.

There are areas of wet boggy lowland heath, this is an extension of the heathland in Heathfield. It is a reminder of what once covered this part of the parish.

An interesting fact came up - the fuel like skin on standing water that can be seen in the vehicle tracks is not oil pollution but is naturally occurring and caused by chemotrophic bacteria in the soil. If you put a stick in it, it comes out clean, not slimy!

### **Haytor Granite, Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2025**

This walk started at Haytor Down carpark and took us out onto the moor. We walked through the old tin workings where alluvial deposits of tin were found and on to Haytor Quarry. This was worked for granite from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century sporadically until 1858 when the quarry closed. What is now a tranquil pond was once a noisy, dangerous quarry.



Bilberries, Bell heather, ling, gorse and tormentil can all be found once out of the quarry and heading to the old tramway which took the granite down to the Stover canal. Cattle, sheep and ponies were all seen along this stretch. From here there are great views across the Becca Brook valley to Hound tor. We followed the tramway down to Holwell quarry and the beehive hut before returning along a similar route.

## **Emsworthy Mire, Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> June 2025**

Andrew Taylor from Devon Wildlife Trust was our guest guide. This is a Devon Wildlife trust site. We met at Saddle tor car park. During springtime there is normally an amazing view of bluebells from the road. This year the bluebells were poor. Cuckoos can frequently be heard across the mire in early spring.

We walked across the head of the Becca brook to the west side of the mire. In the drier area of the reserve ash dieback is an issue and diseased trees which are close to the paths have been felled. Considerable work has been undertaken to reduce the bracken which covers some of the hillside, but it needs to be bashed for several (up to 8) years to kill it. Dead trees are left whenever possible and Anrew showed us one with holes from a variety of birds and insects.



We walked back down to the wetter areas and looked at the ponds, and the plants around and in them. We then walked up the hill, back towards the road, to the old farm which was abandoned in the 1870s. Andrew had just received an archaeological report, so we were able to use the map the find the site of outbuildings.

## **Smallacombe Rocks and Black Hill, Friday August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

We parked at Haytor Down car park with Rob Steemson (DNPA and Teignbridge councillor for Ilsington) as our guide. It was our largest walk yet with 22 people. We walked along the track towards Smallacombe Rocks. We found dobber on the heather, dobber is an invasive species which can cover the heather. There was bell heather, ling and later we found some cross leaved heather along with western gorse. It was a great



time to be out with the yellow and purple of gorse and heather flowers spread across the moor to Haytor rocks.

We passed areas where swaling had taken place allowing for grass regrowth, a sometime controversial practice. This area is owned by DNPA and 5 commoners use the area for animal grazing.

At Smallacombe Rocks we looked at the Bronze Age hut circles and reaves and the views across to Greater and Hound tor. From Black Hill we could see to High Willhays, the highest point on Dartmoor. We walked around the cairn to placate the pixies and headed back on privately owned land. This land is being rewilded. Swaling is only permitted by the owner to create firebreaks. Not far from the car park were pits from tin previous mining