

## DARTMOOR INTERFAITH PILGRIMAGE

On Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> July, 14 followers of the Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist faith traditions gathered at Throwleigh for a pilgrimage walk through the ancient farmland of north-eastern Dartmoor, completing a circuit via Gidleigh, led by Richard Dealler. We started appropriately in Throwleigh parish church, which is on the Mary/Michael Pilgrim's Way, a route described by Richard Dealer, connecting iconic locations between West Cornwall and East Anglia. The church provides facilities for those on pilgrimage to stop, rest and refresh before the next stage of their journeys. Richard gave some initial explanations about the route, most of which we would walk in silence with stops for reflection and conversation. Lunch would be taken at Gidleigh parish church before returning to Throwleigh a different way.

The walk began up through the churchyard with its flowery hay meadow habitat including yellow rattle, ox-eye daisy and betony. From here the route headed south along Deave Lane, a bridleway with ancient origins as a cart-track as evidenced by the use of granite as a firm base for passing traffic, drainage and retaining walls, when so many more people lived and worked in the countryside. The dappled shade from the overhanging trees was magical. We came out on to the public road which we followed along to Providence Place, where we paused for a comfort break and conversation by a Methodist chapel with a plaque on the wall proclaiming 'Bible Christian Chapel, 1889'.

We proceeded quietly down a track leading to a bridge over the Forder Brook, one of many small streams in the area feeding into the River Teign above Chagford. We entered Blackaton Wood, owned and managed by the Woodland Trust, where we were invited to find a quiet spot for reflection for 15 minutes. Some chose to put their feet into the cooling waters of the Blackaton Brook, and one person spotted a dipper, which flew past twice. At the sound of cymbals, we gathered together and shared our thoughts after a quiet time in this delightful place.

We then made our way following the stream to the lane leading up the hill to Gidleigh. We had heard this cawing sound from the top of a tall tree, and spotted a group of ravens, probably the young calling, sounding like its smaller cousin, the crow, but later the rasp of the adult raven was distinctive. Gidleigh parish church advertises cream teas for visitors, and Richard had arranged for us to have tea and cake with the lunches we had brought. The delightful Lyn made us most welcome and allowed us the use of the new composting toilet. And all this with their water supply turned off! We cooled off, chatted and felt very much at home here. After some group photos in the churchyard, we headed back for Throwleigh by a different way.

We left the lane and headed off across the fields along the Mariners' Way, where a buzzard watched our progress, circling overhead. We stopped under a magnificent spreading oak tree where we sat quietly and listened to some Buddhist meditations read by Sophie. We carried on through the wood and rejoined the public road, passed Moortown Farm and heading off to cross the Forder Brook at Aysh, where some visitors were enjoying the open space. From here we walked up to Shilstone with its ancient farm house and an impounded stream which we figured originally provided drinking water for the many working horses passing here at one time. From here we followed the lane back to Throwleigh, where we gathered once more in the church to reflect on our day together. We had seen and shared so much and some wrote a few lines or words to express their thoughts. Richard was thanked for the thoughtful and sensitive way he had led the pilgrimage, and helped us all to deepen our spiritual experience as we learned to slow down to the rhythms of nature.

David Hogan