

Earl Stonham Village Walk
Sunday 16th May 2010

The weather forecast was not so good. EADT wrote “Dry if rather cloudy at first ...” (wrong! I woke to blue sky and sunshine) “then outbreaks of patchy rain through the middle of the day. There will be a moderate south westerly wind, max. temp. 15° C (59° F).” Well, by 11.30 am, I was going round the bungalow closing windows because it was getting really cold. I even put warmer clothes on.

The grey clouds came and went, several times – no rain. 2.00 pm approached. Now, which coat to take. Rain coat just in case? Light coat with some warmth? Decisions, decisions ...

We made the slight detour into Stowupland to collect Lily, our friends’ Springer Spaniel. The socialising is good for her and I always feel walking is so much more pleasurable with a hound at your heels, or, in some cases, at the end of a very long lead. I shall mention no names, but she knows who she is!

The group was gathering. A few different faces, always good to see. The sun comes out, so, do I change my coat or stick with this one? Too late, Tony says we’re off. Fourteen people and seven dogs. Yes I know it does seem a lot of four legged creatures, but, to be fair, Lindsey and Peter did bring three of their shelties, and very well behaved they were too.

The Green Route takes you down the footpath alongside the Green, between the houses and out across the fields, heading to the north east. It was before we got to the fields that Barry Rice realised he no longer had Ben with him. I was at the back of the group so went back onto the Green to see if his ever faithful Border Collie had found something more interesting, but no sign of this “man’s best friend”. Barry said he would go back to the Village Hall, as Ben knew his way home from most anywhere in the village.

The group continued over the bridge, through the thick hedge and then straight ahead. Half way along this splendidly wide path lined with cowslips on the bank of the ditch one side and field bean seedlings just showing through on the other, I had to stop to remove the coat. The sun was warm and the wind had dropped. What was this I could see behind me? Yes, a fast approaching “One Man and his Dog”. Ben had returned to the Land Rover parked in the Village Hall Car Park to await his master’s return. Unluckily for Ben, his master not only returned, but he made him walk back and catch us up. It’s a dog’s life! Tony and the walkers were waiting in the shade of the trees at the end of Larter’s Lane while the talkers and Barry and Ben caught up.

Turning right here, we make our way towards Moat Farm, turning right through the farm buildings, past the huge pile of manure waiting for spreading, and heading on down the drive to Hines Farm. From here you can see Stonham laid out before you. I love this walk whatever the season. It always gives me a sense of belonging and freedom. The wind through your hair (which I normally hate) and the freshness of the air; absolutely wonderful.

Carry on round to the right of Hines Farm and follow the path down to the plank bridge across the ditch at Honey Pot Spinney. I am sure many a local child has played happily here for hours, with a packed lunch to stave off the hunger pangs, if I’m any kind of judge. From here the path follows the stream, with kissing gates, and the fields are all fenced. Somehow it loses its appeal, but times change and now we have the pleasure of seeing the sheep safely grazing with their new-born lambs leaping in the spring sunshine.

We go over the bridge into the paddock of Earl Stonham House. Here, a few geese keep watch from a safe distance. They make a lot of noise, but don’t worry if you are a first time walker. They never come close. Please make sure your dogs are on leads, and close the gates behind you. Making our way diagonally to the right, we cross the paddock, and through the next gate, crossing the bridge and turning immediately right, around the ornamental lake lined with spooky

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black bamboo. This is a wonderful wildlife area, with mature trees, bird boxes and thick hedging. Those who walk it frequently may start to take it for granted, but for others who see it for the first time it can seem like a small piece of paradise. We should all try to take time once in a while to stop and stare.

From here, turn right as you emerge from the trees and follow the path around the field edge to bring you to the end of School Lane and back onto the Village Green.

The kettle boiling, tea and biscuits, and a sit down and natter, and not a drop of rain to be felt. You really can't believe a thing you read in the papers these days, least of all the weather forecast. Have a good summer, and we hope to see you on the Autumn Walk.

Footnote for Gardeners: for those eagle-eyed walkers who spotted the yellow magnolia in the front garden of a cottage in School Lane, it is *Magnolia x brooklynensis* 'Yellow Bird' and had only been there for a week.