DISCOVERY TRAIL AND MARISTOW ESTATE

It’s time to ‘follow the apples’ again along another short section of the Discovery Trail. This long-distance footpath travels 35 miles from Tamerton Foliot in Devon to Launceston/Lifton in Cornwall through some of the most stunning scenery in the Tamar Valley. It is however possible to join it at many of the villages and hamlets along its route, so no-one has to do it all in one go….unless they really want to.

We chose to begin our walk at Lopwell Dam and soon we were leaving the roar of the water pouring over the weir behind us as Juliette led the way towards Blaxton Wood. Most of the Bluebells and Wild Garlic have now gone to seed but there is always something of interest to look at as we walk starting with two swimmers who were taking advantage of the unusually high tide.

Right at the beginning of the trail we encountered the first of today’s fallen trees so everyone had to clamber over these obstacles before actually entering the woodland. It was lovely and shady here, a welcome break from the heat of this June day, many shade-loving plants could be seen as we continued onwards; there were tasty Bilberries, straggly Heathers and lots and lots of Greater Wood Rush and Common Cow Wheat. In several places where the river banks had eroded, some of the trees appeared to be marching down the hillside until their foliage was touching the water.

Further on, after our short break we spotted Violets and white Dog Roses bordering the path and as we neared Blaxton Quay some of us wondered if those Hornets we saw last year would still be there this year flying in and out of a tree beside the path, I am pleased to report that they had moved on.

On arrival at the quay we learnt about the triple lime kilns down by the salt marsh which must be pretty impressive because they have listed status and the National Trust now take care of them. Juliette also read a few notes she had made earlier about this ruined grist mill down at the water’s edge. But the overgrown view ahead bears little resemblance to that immortalised by the British painter, Turner. Joseph Mallord Turner sketched ‘Blaxton Quay, off the River Tavy’ in 1813, just
one of 37,000, sketches, drawings and watercolours completed by this prolific artist in his lifetime. After Turner’s death his family bequeathed the collection to the nation where they are now held in the Tate Gallery in London. Unfortunately it was years before some of the locations he sketched were identified but, in due course it was discovered that Turner must have spent some time sketching in the Tamar Valley. It was two local ladies named Dorothy Kirk and Diana Cook who made the connection and subsequently brought out a book explaining their findings with ‘before and after’ photos, this is entitled ‘Turner in the Tamar Valley’.

From Blaxton Quay, instead of returning via the road as we did last year, Juliette chose to go back the way we had come just as the tide began to recede, but although we could see many footprints on top of the mud flats, the only birds we saw were some Gulls, one Little Egret and a couple of Swans, one of which was honking noisily as it flew past us.

Nearing Maristow House which has now been converted into flats, I began thinking about those wealthy families that once lived here and one family in particular, the Lopes family (pronounced Lopez) who owned land as far as Bickleigh, Shaugh, Walkhampton and Roborough; in fact the village pub in Roborough is still named the Lopes Arms. Some of their descendants still live locally and now even have royal connections thanks to Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall. Her daughter Laura married Tom Lopes and in 2011, their own little daughter Eliza Lopes was the youngest bridesmaid when Prince William married Catherine Middleton. She is seen here with her doting grandparents on the balcony of Buckingham Palace awaiting the flypast.

Back to the walk and we were soon on the home stretch at the end of a lovely relaxing ‘there and back’ walk; on the short road section there was a large group of Gulls to be seen beyond the wall now the tide was lower.