

25 March 2023: Three Choirs Way - British Camp to Worcester via the Malvern Ridge

At 09.00 on Saturday 25 March, the two Colins (to whom we are most grateful) drove Helen, Laurie, Peter and Peter (Bruce having gone sick) from Gloucester Cathedral to the British Camp car park, from where, after stopping at the public loos, we set off along the Malvern Ridge. The weather forecast was a temperature of 9°C at 09.45 when we started walking, rising to 13°C in the afternoon, with a humidity of 66%. When we set off, there were scattered clouds and westerly winds of 10 to 15 mph, with gusts to 25 to 30 mph on the Malvern Ridge. Excellent visibility provided us with stunning views into the far distance. The forecast had not mentioned showers, some of which were quite heavy, but which happily by-passed us. Even with the blustery wind and the showers, the conditions could hardly have been better, albeit, in the afternoon, we encountered a lot of mud because of the previous week's rain.

We by-passed some of the summits on the Malvern Ridge, but we climbed Black Hill, Jubilee Hill and the Worcester Beacon, and our total ascent was about 500 metres. The 150 metre descent into Great Malvern in zig-zags to soften the gradient was below the eastern face of North Hill. After a good lunch in The Nag's Head on Bank Street which, by happy chance, is on the Three Choirs Way, we resumed our walk across Malvern Link Common in bright sunshine. The Common gave way to housing and then to an industrial estate which included the Morgan Motor Company. With a waiting list of six months and no free gifts, we continued on foot.

With Malvern behind us, in passing Madresfield Court, we had an unhappy and most unusual encounter with a dog-walker, who told us that we should not be walking along the Three Choirs Way - a public right of way - as it was a designated 'dog-walking area', verbally abusing one of us in the process. However, we soon put that behind us and continued across gently undulating terrain that was part wooded, part arable, and part grazing for sheep until reaching Old Hills, with a summit of all of 62 metres, from where we had excellent views of our destination. A little further on, we passed Stanbrook Abbey, now a high-end hotel, and crossed more farmland to join the Severn Way on the outskirts of Worcester. There had been little way-marking throughout this six-mile section of the walk, thereby needing field-by-field navigation.

Closed footpaths, with no alternative routes offered, had involved retracing our steps and finding other paths adding almost a mile. The mud had also slowed us down. We reached Worcester about 30 minutes behind schedule. So, we quickened our pace and, with Laurie's help navigating the Worcester streets, caught the train from Shrub Hill with only a few seconds to spare and were back in Gloucester at 17.32. Instead of the planned 15 miles in six hours, we had walked about 16 miles in about six and a half hours. The Malvern Ridge was a real joy.

Peter Barrett