

Journal Entry by Jaye Noble

Wild Nights Young Company Residential Weekend

Pixies Holt, December 4th, 2004

'The subtle chill of autumn sunlight dominated much of this walk as we left the comfort of the hostel in late afternoon for a brisk walk along the riverbank. After a short time we came to Dartmeet and crossed the bridge, stepping down onto the footpath which would take us along the water's edge. Small patches of dappled light escaped the confines of the clouds and touched us all, putting everyone in a good mood as we kept a good pace along the path. We stopped a while to look at a bird resident to the fast-moving, clear river Dart – the Dipper. Our leader, Tom, told us some background information about these small, plump birds, some of which I can recall here. The Dipper flies low and fast, usually following the course of a stream, and they can swim and dive well. Dippers have evolved to exploit a habitat which no other bird uses for they can walk along the riverbed, probing around and under stones to seek all sorts of small creatures, mostly insect larvae but also water snails, tadpoles and fish fry. The particular bird that we spotted was perched on a projecting rock, its plumage a camouflage against the brown stone and white water. After that short break we carried on along the way, when one of the members of the group spotted a sandy bank with some otter tracks leading up to the water. We all stopped to examine this, as otters are rarely seen now. On another part of the bank we noticed some strong-smelling otter spraint. This is used to mark territory, and is usually found on low rocks in the river. After this, we walked on a short way, while straying slightly from the river, and approached an 8,000-year-old forest, which was primitively birch before it was dominated by oak in the fight for space. Here we were instructed to each split up and go into our own private space to appreciate the rugged, wild splendor of the landscape without interruption. I spent my time down by the waterfall, admiring the striking contrast of such lithe, snaking movement against an unchanging background. It has a hypnotic sense to it, a captivating beauty. We were roused from our individual experiences by a piercing birdcall made by Tom to instruct us of our departure. We discussed our observations with the rest of the group before heading back to the hostel, refreshed and exercised. As we came to the end, dusk approached gradually, creeping up slowly to pool in shadows and crevasses before we started the slow climb back to the hostel, each of us contemplating everything that'd happened in that short time before laying down to rest for the night.'

Jaye Noble