CRES/JRI Field Trip: Somerset- a different county

We are pleased to announce that CRES and JRI will be running a one day Field Trip to the Somerset Levels on Saturday 8th July 2017. Many thanks to Dr Andrew Wright (JRI Director) and Rob Walrond (Diocese of Bath and Wells Rural Advisor) for arranging the day. There will be no charge, but a donation will be taken towards costs and a suitable charity. Booking is essential, and the deadline is Saturday 1st July. Below you will find the Programme, Directions, a little background to the area, and how to book.

The Programme

10.30am. Start at Glebe Farm, Pitney, TA10 9AP. Rob Walrond will show us around his farm. This is a 140 acre mixed diversified farm producing its own beef, lamb, pork and eggs. It has a certified organic vegetable section using polytunnels and open field plots. It has a farm shop and a touring caravan site with composting toilets.

12.30pm. Lunch. Please bring your own sandwiches etc. Rob will arrange tea/coffee and the farm shop sells some soft drinks.

1.20pm. Leave for Dillington Estate, TA19 9EG (this is NOT Dillington House which is a nearby Adult Education College). This should take around 30 minutes.

2.00pm. Visit to Dillington Estate. This is a 3000 acre estate growing grains and potatoes, and it has a solar farm. The Estate has several properties in the area that are commercially rented to both estate workers and others.

4.15pm. The end of the day. The two visits will give an interesting contrast of farming styles.

Directions

Glebe Farm is north of Pitney village on a cul de sac. Pitney is north of the B3153.

A) Coming from the M5 leave at J23 then either go through Bridgewater to A372 or on A39 for 6/7 miles. Then take the A361 west; either way you arrive at Othery.

Take the A372 to Langport turn left to follow A372 east. At the small roundabout go straight ahead onto B3153. After a mile, climbing a hill take the left after the controlled pedestrian crossing (Pict Hill). Pitney is signposted on the right in about a mile. See C below.

B) From the A303 take the A372 west from Podimore. After about a mile take the B3153 on the right to Somerton. Continue west from Somerton and after about 2/2.5miles look for the lane on the right, just before the controlled pedestrian crossing -opposite a derelict shop. Pitney is signposted on the right in about a mile. See C below.

C) Both Routes. Proceed to Pitney (roads narrows). Go past the church and look for 'Pitney Farm Shop' on the banks below the hedges on the left at a junction. Turn up hill and proceed 1 mile to 'give way' markings. Turn left (cul de sac). There is a caravan site indicator that should be on your right. Glebe Farm is about 75/100yds on the right.

Dillington Estate (TA19 9EG) is in Whitelackington on the bypassed former A303. The Estate 'yard' is to the east of the village church, and the Estate offices are to the west of the village. More details on the rendezvous point will be given on the day.

Welcome to the Levels

The Somerset Levels have been challenging human efforts to tame them for millennia. The Romans tried, and The Department of the Environment continues to try to finding a balance between dry and waterlogged, voles and humans, access and flooding. The settlements are on small hillocks that rise out of the farm land. Often the site of a church tower or steeple, they offer a view over the water meadows that are fertile but usable for only part of the year. The landscape is criss-crossed by drainage ditches, lined with willow. There is a continual clearing of drains and coppicing of trees. The farms that are outside the

villages are on lesser hillocks but need fodder storage areas to ensure cattle can be fed in the yards over the wet months.

For those who live on the levels but work a few miles away the threat of flooding is a constant danger in the winter: missing the road can drown more than the engine. The silt of the levels settles unevenly and local lanes can be bumpy due to ground heave/subsidence. Village schools have been closed and amalgamated with schools in the larger settlements. Homes are limited, a lot of housing is gentrified artisan's dwellings that are expensive. Some farms and estates provide housing for their own workers, pensioners and other workers.

In some communities the church building and the pub are the only 'community' buildings. The recent major floods of 2012 and 2013 pushed people to local efforts in neighbour care and seeking local solutions when help was a boat ride away. There is no local rail network, bus services are being cut, taxis are not cheap. The roads are narrow and cycling has limited attractions.

The area has a lot to offer naturalists. Flat, readily accessible and offering open vistas, The Levels offer rich photographic opportunities and whether you are a birdwatcher, botanist, beetle enthusiast or just enjoy being outside. There is more than enough to interest anyone. But the locals need home and productive jobs. There are opportunities for conflict. There isn't a lot of low cost new build.

Farmers seek alternative ways of earning a living, and rural communities abound with self-employed/one person companies. Solar farms are part of the landscape, though wind mills --single or in farms groups are almost absent. Old estate barns now house 21C enterprises.

Life here presents challenges, but the rewards in work/life balance are some of the best in the country.

Booking

Please email the CRES Administrator, Lynda McKeown, to book your places by 1st July 2017 Deadline. Email: cres@jri.org.uk