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Wood Walk

We have been making regular visits to our local parks and woods as travel round the city is not possible at present. We have small and large woodlands in the area, some being a longish walk to get to but well worth it once we are there. In the larger woodlands the noise of the traffic on the surrounding roads falls away rapidly. We took a circular walk around one of the larger areas of woodland, doing our best to be as observant as possible in order to get the maximum interest out of the day.

It was bright and warm with a hint of possible showers later on. The tree cover is dense and the place is alive with loud and varied bird song coming from all directions. On an earlier visit when the branches were still bare we could see some of the smaller birds up on high but now it was impossible to see any of them in the leaf canopy. Their songs seem to carry further, being high pitched and repetitive. I am not so conversant with all the songs of the smaller birds but it is easy to identify the calls of the larger ones, wood pigeons, crows, magpies and the occasional flock of ring-necked parakeets.

Several small streams cross the woodland, some with gently trickling water and some reduced to muddy channels, all with little wooden crossings over them. The most interesting bridge was a large fallen tree spanning the channel away from the main path, with its ragged roots up in the air and the trunk providing an ideal crossing for children who might prefer the adventurous route. In some places the path splits up, going round a tree, the direct route side being a muddy depression and the other drier side being the detour round the sapling, producing a rather snaking path. Each time the sun came out the entire scene changed from uniform grey and green to dappled light on the paths and a greater variety of greens, almost yellow for the birch trees and new leaves, and the dark green of the holly, ivy, brambles and nettles.

The main paths are wide and well trodden, with grassy verges to go onto in wet weather. Some of the downhill ones look rather scoured by rain runoff, dry today but with the zigzag pattern of grooves and pebbles, as the heavy winter rain has run down. It would be interesting to see the woodland in such conditions but unless I lived exactly opposite, with dry clothes handy within a few minutes, I am not likely to make the effort to see that happening. The trees would shelter us from the rain at first but after a short while the opposite would be the case, with the water cascading off the leaves and falling on our heads and down our necks, and continuing to drip on us as well, long after the rain had stopped. I was wondering where would be the best place to shelter and thought that would be right up against the largest tree trunk, in the hope that the spreading branches would direct all the water away from the centre.

We reached the other side of the woodland where the path goes alongside some open grassland, out of the shade and into the sunlight. The sky was clear blue with a few small cumulus clouds. At the far end of the field there was a long streak of red field poppies, with the red set against the yellow and white meadow flowers and the sandy coloured tall grasses. We took the path along another side of the field. There were crows walking around in the long grass although most of the time we could only see their heads. No doubt as they walk along the insects fly up so plenty of meals for them there. Further along a different tone of cawing drew our attention to two young ones on a tree branch overhanging the field. They were reminding their parents they were hungry and calling for their next meal to be delivered to them.

Wood Walk

Back in the woodland we came across a tree that had been split vertically by lightning, one side with normal bark and the other side black and burnt. It was quite a small tree and clearly not the tallest around by any means but somehow the lightning found it to be the best route to earth. In some places were huge fallen trees and I tried to imagine the scene as they came down in a gale, starting with a creaking and swaying, followed by the tearing of the roots, smashing of branches and the final booming thump as the massive trunk met the ground, taking with it whatever smaller trees were nearby. An unsafe fallen tree would be quickly sorted out by the rangers but the wood material is always left to decay to encourage the wildlife.

I like to see the stumps of old trees, overgrown mounds completely covered in moss, sometimes with outcrops of curly bracket shaped fungus. The rotted wood is like crumbled toast, falling to pieces when touched. The very old ones are just moss and ivy covered mud mounds,

often with another young tree growing out of it, from a seed that had landed in the new stump before it decayed away. These miniature worlds could be entirely missed if one just strode ahead down the middle of the path intent on getting to a particular destination. It is an exercise in observation.

Lastly we came upon a small open area which looked as if it would be a boggy hollow in winter or maybe even small shallow ponds but now it was dry and full of bracken. Up on the raised edges, where the paths are, were the last showings of foxgloves. At that point I got my wish to see the woodland in rain but as it was very light there was no dramatic weather experience, only the faint rustling sound of drizzly rain on leaves. By the time we exited the woodland twenty minutes later the rainclouds had passed and it was sunny again. The camera was full of the minutiae of the woodland and we were as happy with our outing as if we had travelled across the city to an unknown park or woods. (1061 words)