

Echo reporter Caroline Abbott discovers that walking with llamas along the picturesque East Devon Jurassic Coast adds a twist to a weekend stroll



Llama trekkers, from left, Paul Ferbrache with Blitzen, Maggie Jee, and Caroline Abbott with Golly, set off along the coast path LAURENCE UNDERHILL EE150608\_LU06\_04

BY CAROLINE ABBOTT

I'VE taken dogs for walks countless times. I've even seen the odd cat and ferret on a lead. But walking a llama was a new concept to me.

What made it more bizarre was that I was not in deepest Peru, but East Devon, on a lane between Sidmouth and Otterton to be precise.

Pinn Barton Farm is the base for Peak Hill Llamas, which was established by Maggie Jee and her partner Paul Ferbrache.

Maggie has always had a fascination for llamas. When her elderly horse died and she had an empty stable, she got two as pets.

In April last year she bought six more from a woman who was emigrating, and started giving people the chance to walk along the Jurassic Coast with them.

"They make me laugh," said Maggie.

"They're terrific characters and great fun to walk with. They also notice things before you do so they draw your attention to things you might not otherwise have seen, such as a fox running across the field."

I was about to discover this for myself. I was introduced to Golly, a friendly and inquisitive llama, and shown how to lead him.

Paul took Blitzen, who was lively and over-friendly, no surprise as llamas are herd animals and like to be with their own kind.

# There's no drama when you stride out with a llama

walking up the hill, there was little I could do.

The relaxed pace of the walk was dictated by the llamas. When I walked ahead of Golly I knew he was behind me from his little hums or breathing in my ear.

We walked onto the coast path at the top of Peak Hill, from where we could enjoy spectacular views reaching as far as Portland in the East and Dartmoor in the West.

We got a lot of attention. The sheep seemed bewildered, as if they were trying

to work out if the llamas were a strange kind of sheep. In fact, llamas are related to camels, but Maggie said that keeping llamas is similar to keeping goats.

We passed several rambblers and they all stopped to admire the llamas and ask questions. Invariably, one of the first was: "Do they spit?"

The truth is llamas usually only spit at other llamas to establish dominance, and don't spit at people.

Maggie also said that, despite their size, llamas are

gentle and cannot hurt you. They can't bite you and if they trod on your foot it wouldn't hurt very much because they have soft feet.

I fed Golly and Blitzen llama food and carrot while Maggie and Paul prepared delicious cream teas, using provisions which the llamas had been carrying.

When it was time to leave I found I'd become quite attached to Golly. When I walk now it feels like something is missing. This walk has left lasting memories.



## Walk includes tea break

My walk was arranged with Peak Hill Llamas through Buyagift, a company that offers a range of over 1,000 gift ideas including once-in-a-lifetime experiences, such as Ferrari and tank driving to more

Devon clotted cream, and a drink such as tea or coffee.

Treks run on selected dates throughout the year. Participants must be at least six years old and should be aware they will not ride