

Ben Walton - Slapton Ley, Devon, March 2015

In March 2015, I spent a week at Slapton Ley, Devon, as part of the Pt IA Evolution and Behaviour course. The aim of the trip was to emphasise and reiterate areas of the course discussed in Lectures and Labs, and also give students an opportunity to gain firsthand experience of topics covered.

The first day of the trip was spent in the area around the field centre in which we were based. The woods around Slapton Ley have a diverse range of flora and were a great opportunity to see many of the plant groups which had been discussed in the lecture series in Michaelmas, on the transition of plants onto land and their subsequent evolution and radiation.

The Ley itself, separated from the sea by a narrow stretch of beach, was an excellent opportunity to look at a freshwater ecosystem. Most organisms in the Ley were invertebrate, but there were also fish in the water and Grebes on it.

One of the highlights of the trip for me personally was our visit to the Eden project. The Project recreates tropical and Mediterranean biomes, and contains a diverse range of interesting plants not native to the UK

For the rest of the week we visited a range of rocky and sandy shores around the Devonshire coast. It was the week of the Solar eclipse and as a result the tides were extremely good for seeing the range of fauna on the rocky shore. These trips complemented the main lecture series of the previous term, on the evolution and radiation of animals.

Part of the week included completing a short research project based on the marine life in the area. With another student from Pembroke I investigated the effects of predators on Bryozoa (small colonial organisms found encrusted on seaweed). Leading the experiment was a useful experience; all too often lab work in the university only involves following instructions. I thought this independently led research was one of the most useful parts of the trip.

Nights were spent in the local Pub with staff from the zoology department. Dr Richard Preece, in charge of the Trip, had a wealth of experience. Hearing his experiences, including his previous trips to the Pitcairn Islands, was extremely interesting, as were the other members of the department on the trip.

I am extremely glad I chose to visit Devon, and without the support from the college this would have been difficult. It proved an invaluable experience and helped me understand and enjoy the course even more, going into topics with a depth not possible within the short terms and lecture series.