

Dumfriesshire Botany Group at Burleywhag 21 July 2021

On a very hot day a small group of 4 of us met on the road just south of Mitchellsacks. Our aim was to record in monad squares on the western flank of Queensbury Hill, at 697m the southernmost but most prominent of the Lowther Hills. These monads had no previous records.

We followed the track passing through the farm and on through the area we had recorded in 2020. The reason for looking at this country further up the Capel Burn was because last year we had found the first record of Globeflower for the Queensbury Hill on rocks beside the burn which suggested other nice things might be found.

The habitats are varied. There is wet heath and grassland, blanket bog, flushes, steep rocky slopes with dry grassland, scree and deeply cut burns. Much of the flora is typical of underlying acid glacial morainic material but in places flushes or boulder clay gives an enriched flora.



Cooling off at lunchtime Spout Cleuch

At Browne Knowe there is a reasonable blanket mire on level ground with plenty of, **Round-leaved Sundew** *Drosera rotundifolia*, **Hare's-tail Cottongrass** *Eriophorum vaginatum*, **Common Cottongrass** *Eriophorum angustifolium*, and **Common Deergress** *Trichophorum germanicum*. There was also plenty of the sterile **Hybrid Deergress** *Trichophorum x foersteri*. This often occurs without the rarer parent Northern Deergress which could not be found. At this time of year it is most obvious as it lacks any fruit. By the time we reached New Burleywhag, now a ruin but which looks as if it was built as a replacement for Burleywhag itself further up the valley it was time for lunch. We took this in as shady a spot as possible at the base of Spout Cleuch where we were able to bathe our feet in the cooler water. Spout Cleuch is steeply cut into the flank of the hill and in places supports vegetation out of reach of grazing animals and enriched by seepage. In a deep wooded gully we found **Beech Fern** *Phegopteris connectilis* and **Mountain Melick**, *Melica nutans* an attractive grass of crags in the hills. Higher up on more open though rocky ground there was plenty of **Slender Eyebright** *Euphrasia micrantha* with its small pink flowers and purple leaves. It was also nice to see **Sparce-leaved**

Hawkweed *Hieracium sparsifolium*, with its distinctive purple mottled leaves. It has not been recorded in the Hectad since 1971.

We followed one of the tributaries of Spout Cleuch up to Three Knowe Heads not gaining too much height but allowing us to drop down into the Berry Grain and Glenbeath, another deeply cut water course. In the Berry Grain we came across **Mossy Saxifrage** *Saxifraga hypnoides* and in Glenbeath it and **Starry saxifrage** *Saxifraga stellaris* were plentiful on the rocks by the water course. On a little rocky outcrop lower down we were pleased to see **Hairy Stonecrop** *Sedum villosum* in a little runnel. Also on the rocks was **Strict Hawkweed** *Hieracium strictiforme* one of the leafy Hawkweeds. This was confirmed by David McCosh a national expert.



Strict Hawkweed Glenbeath

As the Glenbeath burn reaches the flatter valley and becomes the Capel Burn it passes the old house at Burleywhag. This is now a mountain bothy and we paused in the cool shelter inside and looked at the visitor book. There were people from all over visiting and using the bothy. It was well maintained and had many old photographs of families that had presumably lived here in the last 100 or so years. So the original Burleywhag has out lived what we took to be its newer replacement a kilometer down the valley that we had passed earlier. On its walls was a nice population of the fern **Rustyback** *Asplenium ceterach* and in the surrounding ground although sheep grazed the very uncommon **Good-King-Henry** *Blitium bonus-henricus*. This is a plant long associated with houses where it was a reliable vegetable and probably survives here at the Bothy from a time when it was part of the household diet. It is a rare plant in Dumfriesshire.