

Glamorgan Botany Group

2015 Excursion Report

Despite ending up running only five excursions this year, we enjoyed some very good botanising – undoubted highlights being Italian Lords-and-Ladies on the first excursion and some rare Water-peppers on the last.

We hope you enjoyed these trips, and look forward to seeing you next year! As always, let us know if you have any ideas for places to visit.

David Barden, Karen Wilkinson and Julian Woodman

Michaelston-le-Pit, Dinas Powis – Saturday 25 April

Despite the rather complex meeting arrangements (!), 15 botanists turned out for the first excursion, in pleasant weather with some sunshine.

Heading first down the lane from Cwrt-yr-Ala and then westwards up the valley of the Wrinstone Brook, we soon found both subspecies of *Ficaria verna* (Celandine), growing adjacent to each other. This was soon followed by a single clump of the hybrid between *Viola reichenbachiana* (Common Dog-Violet) and *V. riviniana* (Early Dog-Violet), which is not often encountered and even then not always possible to be sure about, because of the variability of the parents.



The bulbils in *Ficaria verna* ssp. *bulbilifer* are not always obvious because they generally appear later in the season, but Paul Green demonstrated how its more angular leaf margin (left) can help to distinguish it from ssp. *verna* (right).



The very leafy clumps, intermediate flowers, and lack of fertile pods convinced us of the identity of this specimen of *Viola reichenbachiana* x *riviniana*.

In the eastern part of the woodland, *Petasites fragrans* (Winter Heliotrope) and *Vinca minor* (Lesser Periwinkle) were dominant in places, but further on these aliens were replaced by a more interesting assemblage of native plants. These included *Carex strigosa* (Thin-spiked Wood Sedge), *Adoxa moschatellina* (Moschatel), *Paris quadrifolia* (Herb Paris), *Lathraea squamaria* (Toothwort) and *Milium effusum* (Wood Millet).

The rare native *Arum italicum* ssp. *neglectum* (Italian Lords-and-Ladies) was on our wish-list, having last been recorded in the woods here in 1968. We spent some while discussing a plant in a small abandoned quarry, but were forced to conclude that it wasn't really convincing enough – though it might have been a hybrid with the abundant *A. maculatum* (Lords-and-Ladies). We were very pleased therefore, to find a much better specimen across the stream. The task of spotting likely plants was made difficult by the fact that many plants had had their spathes eaten off – so the useful character of the pale yellow spadix was of no use to us!

Having stopped for lunch, we soon built up a good species list for a pleasant byway running north from Wrinstone Farm, where earlier we had sought permission to enter Coed y Cymdda on either side of the dry valley to the north.

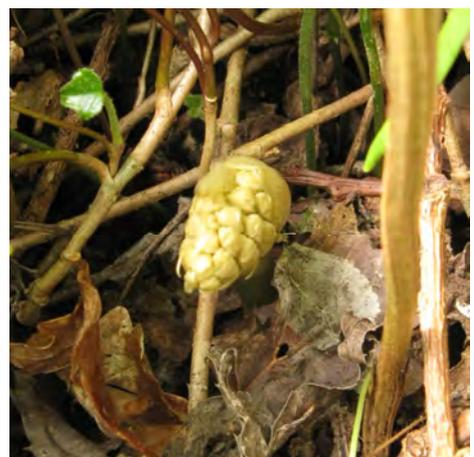
Moving up into this valley, we split into two groups to cover the south-eastern and north-western slopes. Parts were cattle-grazed, while other areas were fenced off and rather impassable – but there was plenty of variety, and a number of interesting finds (see photos). Reconvening at the top of the wood, we found plenty of *Paris* once again, on our way back to our starting point.



We were very pleased to find *Arum italicum* ssp. *neglectum* (top left), with larger, darker-green leaves than its common relative *A. maculatum* (bottom right).



In the south-eastern part of Coed y Cymdda the group found a couple of plants of *Platanthera chlorantha* (Greater Butterfly Orchid, left) and *Neottia ovata* (Twayblade, right). Thanks to Caroline Langdon for the photos.



Highlights from the north-western part of Coed y Cymdda were (left to right) an albino *Orchis mascula* (Early Purple Orchid) amongst a population of normal-coloured plants, a plant of *Polystichum setiferum* (Soft Shield Fern) with attractively divided pinnules, and a single emerging spike of *Neottia nidus-avis* (Bird's-nest Orchid) near two spikes from last year.

David Barden

Barry Island – Saturday 16 May

Eleven of us gathered at Whitmore Bay on a fine but breezy day, determined to eschew the usual entertainments of Barry Island in favour of diversions of a botanical nature! In classic botanising style, we spent the first hour in the new (but apparently only temporary) Nell's Point car-park, examining a floristically diverse gravelly embankment. Crucifers, grasses and poppies were a focus of our identification efforts here, with highlights being *Anisantha madritensis* (Compact Brome), *Papaver dubium* (Long-headed Poppy), *P. lecoqii* (Yellow-juiced Poppy) and *P. argemone* (Prickly Poppy).



A mystery in the Nell's Point car-park was this apparently umbelliferous plant. For the *Vegetative Key* addicts amongst us, the stems were green with weak reddish-coloured longitudinal ridges, and the leaves were finely serrate with stomata on both sides. Two possible *Sium* (Water Parsnip) species can be discounted because of the channelling of the petioles and the narrow upper leaves. A *Cicuta* (Cowbane) species seems a possibility, but the leaves didn't have a celery scent, apparently discounting the European *C. virosa*. Anyone familiar with the North American species?



Reseda alba (White Mignonette) – seen in the foreground – was frequent in the Nell's Point car-park.



Ranunculus bulbosus plants with a mixture of reflexed and patent sepals caused us some confusion!



Allium roseum growing with *Smyrniolus olusatrum* (Alexanders) – another non-native prone to get out of hand!

Heading down to the sea-front, we found *Malva arborea* (Tree Mallow) in flower, while an area of relatively untamed *Bromopsis erecta* (Upright Brome) grassland yielded *Trifolium ornithopodioides* (Bird's-foot Clover) and an aberrant colony of *Ranunculus bulbosus* (Bulbous Buttercup).

All over the sloping strip of short-mown turf above the promenade, *Sherardia arvensis* (Field Madder) and *Trifolium scabrum* (Rough Clover) were abundant–dominant. We searched diligently for other annual clovers, but found only a little more *T. ornithopodioides* and one patch of *T. micranthum* (Slender Trefoil). *Eschscholzia californica* (Californian Poppy) had self-seeded on a wall in one place, while *Lamium amplexicaule* (Henbit Dead-nettle) was locally abundant in a set of unplanted flower-beds. At the eastern end of the promenade, we headed up, passing a fine population of the Mediterranean species *Allium roseum* (Rosy Garlic) on the way.

The flora changed markedly after lunch as we headed out on to Friars Point, with a reasonable maritime-limestone flora in evidence. *Beta vulgaris* (Sea Beet), *Carex distans* (Distant Sedge), *Limonium binervosum* agg. (Rock Sea-lavender) and *Danthonia decumbens* (Heath Grass) were nice to see, but otherwise there was not much to detain us here – all the more so given the bone-chilling gale-force westerly that threatened any moment to send recording cards and notebooks flying out to sea! Given this, even the paltry total of 19 species in the tiny fragment of habitat present in monad TL1165 seemed a reasonable achievement. A more sheltered field at the western tip of the island, known to some members of the group from previous visits, held a good mix of grassland species including *Primula veris* (Cowslip) and *Betonica vulgaris* (Betony).



A bright but very breezy day on Friar's Point!

At this point we retraced our steps and, pausing for an ice-cream at last, ventured out round Nell's Point at the other end of the island. On the way we passed through reseeded grassland on the old Butlin's site, containing robust non-native variants of *Trifolium campestre* (Hop Trefoil) and *Galium verum* (Lady's Bedstraw). The seepages by the footpath on the western side of Jackson's Bay held plenty of *Carex distans*, as well as *Samolus valerandi* (Brookweed), and one old spike of *Orobancha hederæ* (Ivy Broomrape). The known specimen of the county rarity *Sorbus torminalis* (Wild Service-tree) was seen high on the cliffs, while not far away extensive patches of *Adiantum capillus-veneris* (Maidenhair Fern) were noted. A little more of this was seen by the path leading up to the road, where we also saw *Fumaria muralis* ssp. *boroei* (Common Ramping Fumitory). A meander through the new housing estate then brought us back to the car-park, which yielded *Senecio squalidus* (Oxford Ragwort), to round off an interesting day!



***Brassica oleracea* (Wild Cabbage) was frequent on the cliffs in Jackson's Bay.**

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River Taff, Merthyr Vale & Troedyrhiw – Saturday 20 June

The weather was mostly rather cloudy with some light showers, but this did not diminish the enthusiasm of seven of us from heading into botanically little-known territory along the River Taff.

At Troedyrhiw, we actually spent a short while directly *above* the river, where there we compared *Vulpia myuros* (Rat's-tail Fescue) with *V. bromoides* (Squirrel-tail Fescue) at the base of the walls on either side of the bridge. Heading south, we found *Salix fragilis* (Crack Willow) by the river's edge, and a suite of *Epilobium* (Willowherb) species in area of waste ground – *ciliatum* (American), *hirsutum* (Great), *parviflorum* (Hoary), *roseum* (Pale) and possibly *obscurum* (Short-fruited) were all distinguished without too much trouble.



The shingly margins of the River Taff at Troedyrhiw were coloured yellow with *Rorippa sylvestris* (Creeping Yellow-cress).



A specimen of *Asplenium scolopendrium* (Hart's-tongue) with frilly margins was noted in woodland close to the river south of Troedryhiw.

By the river, gravelly vegetated areas of the sort we had been hoping to find were rare, but in one such place we did see *Myosoton aquaticum* (Water Chickweed). Here also was *Cruciata laevipes* (Crosswort), which we later found to be common all the way to Merthyr Vale.



Cruciata laevipes was frequent-abundant by the path.



Artemisia absinthum was seen by the river's edge.

Continuing along the footpath, our attention was occupied by a large damp area of mown amenity grassland, with a selection of species of seasonally waterlogged ground, including *Lythrum portulaca* (Water Purslane) and *Glyceria declinata* (Small Sweet-grass). *Verbena officinalis* (Vervain) was a pleasant surprise on a gravelly path, as was a small quantity of *Lamium album* (White Dead-nettle), hardly a common plant in the vice-county. A tiny *Sagina* was identified as *S. filicaulis* (Slender Pearlwort), distinguishable by the obtuse outer sepals.



During lunch, we mused over a patch of *Circaea* that had the more denticulate leaves of *C. alpina* x *lutetiana* (Upland Enchanter's Nightshade), but that were not really quite cordate enough at the base; neither did they have the flowers or fruits that would have clinched the identification.

The path from this point was path on the top of a wide well-vegetated embankment, close enough to the river for occasional detours. The flora was diverse, with a slight mining-spoil influence – though thankfully no evidence of reseeding with non-natives. Species of interest included *S. asperum* x *officinale* (Russian Comfrey), *Tragopogon pratensis* (Goat's-beard) ssp. *minor*, and *Silene vulgaris* (Bladder Campion), rather uncommon away from the south-east Vale.

Approaching Merthyr Vale, *Echium vulgare* (Viper's Bugloss) was prominent in an area of imported sand at the edge of a playing field. Further on, we were surprised to see *Geranium pratense* (Meadow Cranesbill) and *Lychnis flos-cuculi* (Ragged Robin) growing on a pile of soil, where works to install a new bypass and bridge had begun.

The banks of the river between this point and the old bridge proved quite interesting, with *Artemisia absinthum* (Wormwood), *Tanacetum vulgare* (Tansy), *Malva moschata* (Musk Mallow) and *Saponaria officinalis* (Soapwort) all being seen, as well as abundant *Sison amomum* (Stone Parsley). Nearby, *Potamogeton natans* (Broad-leaved Pondweed), *P. crispum* (Curled Pondweed) and *Elodea canadensis* (Canadian Waterweed) were growing together in the river.



***Lathyrus nissolia* was abundant over a substantial area on the old Merthyr Vale Colliery site.**

To round off the day, we diverted briefly into a large area of grassland, where we found a large population of *Lathyrus nissolia* (Grass Vetchling). Finally, nearing our meeting point again, we paused to consider how *Carex disticha* (Brown Sedge) might have got on to the top of a retaining earth-and-stone wall by the main road! All in all, it was a rewarding day, with a surprising diversity of species.

David Barden

Gelligaer – Sunday 26 July

Cancelled due to wet weather (apologies to all who had been looking forward to this – we may try again next year!)

Deri, Bargoed – Saturday 15 August

Seven botanists gathered at Deri on a bright, breezy day, with some good sunny spells. In what might too easily become something of a bad habit (see the Barry Island report...), we again spent a considerable time in the car-park, which held a variety of gravel-loving species, including some *Reseda luteola* (Weld) and *Centaureum erythraea* (Common Centaury). Here there was also some *Primula veris* (Cowslip), presumably from a seed mix or otherwise imported, and plenty of *Malva moschata* (Musk Mallow).

A shady path by the riverside caused us to divert from our intended route, and here we found *Elymus caninus* (Bearded Couch), followed by a lone specimen of *Potentilla* with



***Reseda luteola* was the first species of interest on the Deri excursion.**



This specimen of *Rorippa islandica* was one of the few to rise above the surface of a shallow pool. Note the distinctive downturned pods.

allegiances to *P. anglica* (Trailing Cinquefoil) in more open ground. This damp grassy area occupied us for the rest of the morning, with a highlight being plenty of the nationally rare *Rorippa islandica* (Northern Yellow-cress), persisting where first found by Julian in the 1990s. *Carex pilulifera* (Pill Sedge) was locally abundant here, and David spotted some *Epilobium palustre* (Marsh Willowherb) in a water-filled ditch.



The margins of a pond in the area of damp grassland furnished the glandular, large-flowered *Euphrasia officinalis* ssp. *pratensis* (formerly *E. rostkoviana* (Rostkov's Eyebright)).

After lunch, we headed up onto the slopes to the south of the old railway, dominated by *Calluna vulgaris* (Heather). However, the path we had been hoping to take was impassable with *Pteridium aquilinum* (Bracken), so we instead headed along the old railway back to Deri, and then up onto a more well-used route. This took us up across steep slopes densely covered with more *Pteridium*, clearly used by local thrillseekers for what I guess might be called 'bracken-sledging'. Deciding not to risk life and limb in this way, we had to be content with the almost-as-exciting colony of *Corydalis claviculata* (Climbing Corydalis) growing next to the footpath.



A number of sites for *Corydalis claviculata* have recently been found in v.c. 41, and it is perhaps not as uncommon as the 1994 Flora suggests.

The top of the hill gave us very good views, but botanically it was unexceptional, with large areas of 'improved' grassland. A sole highlight here was *Spergularia rubra* (Sand Spurrey) growing in the central lightly-vegetated strip of the lane running towards Tir-y-felin.



It's not a vascular plant... but it's worth devoting a bit of space to the interesting fungus *Hymenochaete corrugata*, which grows only on dead hazel, binding twigs together where they cross.

Deciding we needed a bit of adventure after this, we took a footpath that dropped down into a small but steep-sided valley. The far side of this had a reasonable area of very wet flushed (though rather shaded) grassland, with mostly small quantities of *Wahlenbergia hederacea* (Ivy-leaved Bellflower), *Anagallis tenella* (Bog Pimpernel), *Scutellaria minor* (Lesser Skullcap), *Viola palustris* (Marsh Violet), *Equisetum palustre* (Marsh Horsetail), and other typical species.

Apart from Karen's non-botanical find of the peculiar fungus *Hymenochaete corrugata* (Hazel Glue), the rest of our walk back to Deri yielded nothing of particular note, other than some *Anisantha madritense* (Compact Brome) as a pavement weed in the village itself.

David Barden

Coed y Gedrys, Gwaelod-y-Garth – Sunday 6 September

Under clear skies and with scarcely a breeze, the weather could hardly have been better for our visit to this Forestry Commission (NRW) woodland in the Taff valley. From the pub, eleven of us made our way up the hill into the most southerly part of the wood, quickly finding many species typical of acid woodland and gravelly tracks.



Some highlights of the main track through Coed y Gedrys included (left to right) a white-flowered *Odontites vernus* (Red Bartsia), several square metres with frequent *Sagina nodosa* (Knotted Pearlwort), and a single plant of *Trifolium arvense* (Hare's-foot Clover).

The *Larix* seen was decided to be the widely planted but perhaps often overlooked hybrid between *L. decidua* (European Larch) and *L. kaempferi* (Japanese Larch). David confirmed the presence of *Hypericum maculatum* (Imperforate St John's Wort) x *H. perforatum* (Perforate St John's Wort) on the basis of a plant with frequent translucent glands ('perforations') on at least some of the upper leaves, and broad but acute sepals.

Moving uphill, we found that clearance of the south-west part of the wood had dramatically altered the 'feel' of the footpath here – previously a narrow, deeply shaded route between dense stands of conifers. With excellent views to the north, we stopped here for lunch, but the botanical interest was rather limited by the thick and fairly uniform layer of woody detritus left from conifer clearance. However, *Carex pilulifera* (Pill Sedge) was frequent to abundant, while *C. laevigata* (Smooth-stalked Sedge) was found in a few places.



Botanising in the sunshine on the main track through Coed y Gedrys.

A short section of the track to Lan Farm had some *Melampyrum pratense* (Common Cow-wheat), and the lane to the north was reasonably species-rich, with 'axiophytes' such as *Betonica officinalis* (Betony), *Succisa pratensis* (Devil's-bit Scabious), *Valeriana officinalis* (Common Valerian), *Persicaria bistorta* (Bistort) and *Melica uniflora* (Wood Melick).

The remaining members of the group then headed along a riverside path, which at first was not particularly interesting. However, the presence of *Spergularia rubra* (Sand Spurrey), *S. arvense* (Corn Spurrey) and *Rorippa sylvestris* (Creeping Yellow-cress) hinted at better things to come, and indeed the most southerly field proved to be the best botanical site of the year's excursions. Low-lying and with substantial areas of standing water, *Persicaria* species were abundant here. *P. hydropiper* (Water-pepper) and *P. maculosa* (Redshank) were unsurprising, but the amount of *P. minor* (Small Water-pepper) was remarkable – certainly its largest site in Glamorgan. Two other taxa remain to be confirmed, but the smart money is on *P. mitis* (Tasteless Water-pepper) as only the second extant Glamorgan site, and *P. maculosa* x *minor* as a new vice-county record.

Heading back along the lane into the village, we added a few typical hedge-bank species and garden escapes to our very substantial species list for the day.

David Barden



(Left) *Persicaria* species (here mostly *minor*) were remarkably abundant in shallow ditches and depressions. (Centre) Putative *maculosa* x *minor*. (Right) Comparison of *hydropiper*, *minor*, putative *maculosa* x *minor* and *maculosa*. Thanks to Tim Rich for the photos.