

Stroanfreggan and Culmark Moss, 24th August 2019

This meeting was to replace one scheduled here last year but cancelled following days of very heavy rainfall and the threat of flooding. But this time we were in luck as the weather was fine.

7 of us met at the Cleugh (previously visited earlier this year) to leave some cars behind as parking was limited at the chosen site. I had planned to cover two monads; in the event we covered two but one of which was not previously chosen. The first monad around Stroanfreggan Bridge quickly revealed surprises – the ground looked to be acidic; the quarry on the way up this ridge held maidenhair spleen wort *Asplenium trichomanes*, lady fern *Athyrium filix-femina*, male fern *Dryopteris filix-mas*, the creeping stems of New Zealand willowherb *Epilobium brunnescens*, the inevitable bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and jointed rush *Juncus articulatus* and lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula* in the waterlogged rut. We quickly discovered that the top of the ridge and the NE side leading up to the hill fort and cairn was distinctly acidic with purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, deer-grass *Trichophorum germanicum*, mat grass *Nardus stricta*, heath rush *Juncus squarrosus*, heather *Calluna vulgaris*, heath milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia*, heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, and surprisingly a single, still flowering, plant of mountain pansy *Viola lutea*.



View from the cairn to the NE (David Hawker)

The other side of the ridge with the SW-facing rock exposures was anything but. It was much more diverse with abundant clumps of thyme *Thymus praecox*, some fairy flax *Linum catharticum*, mouse-ear hawkweed *Pilosella officinarum*, pill sedge *Carex pilulifera*, heath grass *Danthonia decumbens*, bell heath *Erica cinerea*,

common dog violet *Viola riviniana*, wood ragwort *Senecio sylvatica*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*, the bright yellow flowers of creeping St John's wort *Hypericum humifusum* and wood sage *Teucrium scorodonia*. The hill-top fort on this ridge proved equally interesting with lady's bedstraw again, with several of the above species.

Back along the river which didn't have any submerged or floating aquatics – too swiftly flowing over a stony bed – we only found some water *Eleocharis palustris* and water pepper *Persicaria hydropiper*. A small recently planted plantation near the bridge included scattered aspen *Populus tremula*, devil's bit scabious *Succisa pratensis* and the inevitable rosebay willow-herb *Chamerion angustifolium*. The bridge gave us black spleenwort *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum*, wallrue, *A. rutamuraria* and hartstongue fern *A. scolopendrium*.

Back to the cars and move to the next monad to reconnoitre the nearby Culmark Moss. Many years ago I'd been appalled to see that it had been ploughed preparatory to forestry planting, which fortunately had never been carried out. Probably due to a change in FC planting which no longer grant-aid planting on ground where the peat exceeded 50 cm deep – which this site obviously was. Being very acid we soon found both cotton grasses, hare's tail *Eriophorum vaginatum* and common *E. angustifolium*. Followed closely by cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*, the sickle-shaped leaves of bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum* and surprising amounts of the slender trailing stems, and a few bright red berries, of cranberry *Vaccinium oxycoccus*,



Cranberry *Vaccinium oxycoccus* (David Hawker)

And while we were looking at fruiting, and a few still flowering, round-leaved sundews *Drosera rotundifolia*, a dramatically coloured ground beetle was seen

scrambling through the bog-mosses. Ross subsequently managed to get the beetle into his hand and Sarah took photos of it amongst the mosses.



Carabus nitens, Culmark Moss (Sarah)

It was subsequently confirmed, as Ross said on site, as *Carabus nitens* for which there are few previous records for D&G. It's a Nationally Scarce species which cannot fly and is confined to places just like this mire/bog which is a new site in D&G. Unfortunately the site was still degraded with obvious signs of ATV use (rutted ground) and slow colonisation by scattered sitka spruce *Picea sitchensis* and may still be under threat of degrading further.

On the way back to the cars we diverted to a cairn/barrow beside which was a drain which held a few clumps of water mint *Mentha aquatica*, a starwort *Calliriche brutia*, surprisingly several shoots of the blue-flowered water forget-me-not *Veronica scutellata*, marsh bedstraw *Galium palustre*, marsh violet *Viola palustris*, flote grass *Glyceria fluitans* and bog stitchwort *Stellaria alsine*. The cairn/barrow held little of note plant-wise.

In all, we had 135 plant species, the notable ones – for me - being mountain pansy, cranberry and water forget-me-not, but all crowned by the *Carabus* beetle.