

Glamorgan Botany Group

2023 Excursion Report

The most memorable excursion this year was undoubtedly our visit to the Gower in May, with glorious sunshine, fantastic plants ... and cake! ... rewarding the record number of botanists who turned out to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the group.

Our other excursions could hardly match that, but nevertheless we found plenty of interesting plants, generated nearly 2300 records, carried out a detailed survey of *Cirsium tuberosum* (see the July write-up), and shared innumerable identification tips on trickier plants.

Thanks to everyone who has contributed to the group's success since we started in 2013, and we look forward to more enjoyable botanising in future years!

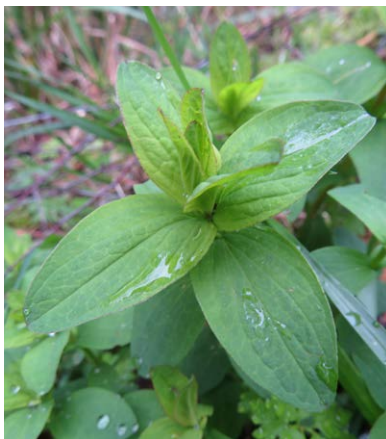
David Barden, Karen Wilkinson and Julian Woodman

Cefn Mabley Woods – Sunday 16 April

Those who joined us at the allocated time for this excursion missed the most dramatic part of the day – a momentary panic when we thought that we'd been given the wrong key to unlock the entrance gate! Fortunately, having worked out that there were in fact two locks, and we were attempting to open the wrong one, we managed to gather our wits, and the near-record crowd of 19 botanists were able to park along the gravelled track leading into the forestry, rather than cause a traffic jam on Cefn-porth Road.

So it was that we started off along a gravelled track amongst conifers into this much-modified NRW-managed 'plantation on an ancient woodland site' (PAWS), on a cloudy but mostly dry day.

The vegetation was not that well-advanced, and – as is typical at this time of year – we found a few plants that sparked lively discussion over their identity. But many species caused us no problems, including rosettes of *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* (Common Spotted Orchid), a specimen of the little-recorded *Rumex crispus* × *R. obtusifolius* = *R. × pratensis* (a hybrid dock), and some *Carex strigosa* (Thin-spiked Wood Sedge).



On the basis of the frequent translucent glands, we wondered if this was *Hypericum* × *desetangsii* (Des Etangs' St John's-wort), but the numerous clumps present cast doubt on this. Examination of other plants elsewhere, known for sure to be *H. maculatum* (Imperforate St John's-wort), showed that it does have plenty of glands on the young leaves early in the year, resolving our confusion!

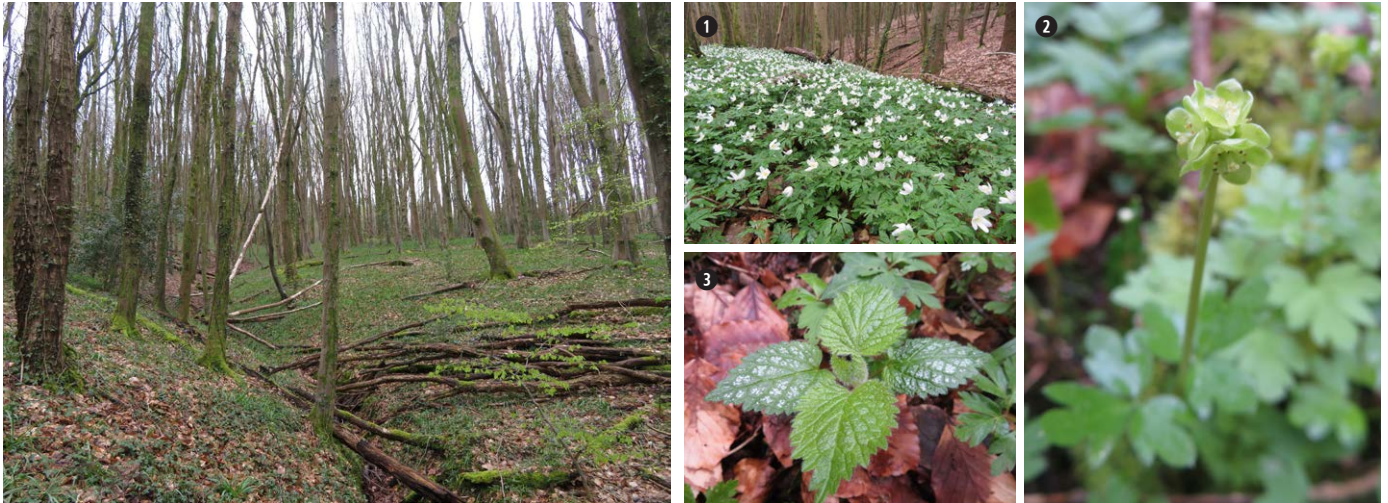


One puzzling plant in Cefn Mabley Woods was this *Ficaria verna* (Celandine), showing the bulbils of subsp. *verna*, but with a leaf shape more typical of subsp. *fertilis*.



Tim demonstrates the leaves and cones of the planted conifer *Thuja plicata* (Western Red Cedar).

Crossing another track, we moved into a large area of planted and rather spindly *Fagus sylvatica* (Beech), with sheets of *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* (Bluebell) and areas of *Anemone nemorosa* (Wood Anemone) doing fairly well under the canopy. The ground flora was not very varied, but did include some *Oxalis acetosella* (Wood Sorrel), *Lamiastrum galeobdolon* subsp. *montanum* (Yellow Archangel), *Viola reichenbachiana* (Early Dog Violet), *Luzula sylvatica* (Great Wood-rush) and *L. pilosa* (Hairy Wood-rush), with a highlight being 2 sq.m of *Adoxa moschatellina* (Moschatel) by the stream.



The Beech plantation held *Anemone nemorosa* ❶, *Adoxa moschatellina* ❷, and *Lamiastrum galeobdolon* subsp. *montanum* ❸. The latter, being so early in the year, shows the silvery colouring on the young leaves that is much more prominently developed on the invasive garden plant subsp. *argentatum*.



The nodding flowers of both *Ribes sanguineum* (Flowering Currant, left) and *R. rubrum* (Red Currant, right) were seen by the trackside.

We then headed back onto the track, and down towards the south end of the wood. This had a rather different character, with a denser shrub layer and a greater diversity of ground flora. A small damp, gravelly clearing produced *Leontodon saxatilis* (Lesser Hawkbit), rather unusual in such a situation.

The quality of the botanising improved further towards the S boundary, where the woodland was decidedly 'ancient' in character. More *Adoxa* was



The striking unfurling fronds of *Dryopteris affinis* (Scaly Male Fern) – and not *Scolopax rusticicola* (Woodcock), as determined by a smartphone app! (To be honest, though, it did pretty well on most other stuff, even vegetative plants).



Towards the S edge of Cefn Mabley Woods – with plenty of *Corylus avellana* (Hazel) and a fairly diverse ground flora, it was quite different from the rest of the wood.

found along the stream, along with some *Sanicula europaea* (Sanicle), but the highlight was plenty of *Paris quadrifolia* (Herb Paris). It had not previously been recorded for this wood, and was found in two colonies along the line of a long-defunct bank, with two small outlying patches.



Always a highlight on any excursion by the group – one of the patches of *Paris quadrifolia* doing very well on an old bank.



And on an otherwise rather gloomy day, *Cardamine pratensis* (Cuckooflower) provided a little brightness on our way back to the cars!

With the day drawing to a close, we headed back along the track to the entrance, spotting on the way some *Melica uniflora* (Wood Melick), and some *Polystichum aculeatum* (Hard Shield Fern). This was growing with a couple of plants that were possibly, but not conclusively, hybrids with *P. setiferum* (Soft Shield Fern), which was locally frequent in the area.

Overall, we felt we had added a respectable number of spring-flowering species to the list for this woodland, which previously had been rather little-recorded, and only visited by botanists during the summer months.

Port Eynon, Gower – Saturday 13 May

To celebrate the 10th anniversary of the group, we'd decided to go somewhere different from usual, and a visit to the Gower was the obvious choice, not least to catch *Scilla verna* (Spring Squill) in its prime!



Scilla verna putting on a stunning show at Port Eynon Point.





Some highlights of the quarries included *Clinopodium acinos* ❶, *Geranium sanguineum* ❷, *Centaurea scabiosa* var. *succisifolia* ❸, *Helianthemum oelandicum* ❹ and *Bromus hordeaceus* subsp. *ferronii* ❺.

As the photos show, the weather complied with our plans, and the 21 people who came along enjoyed perfectly clear skies, warm sunshine and light winds.

To begin with, we headed S from the car park at Port Eynon, and along the footpath found *Orchis mascula* (Early Purple Orchid) to be frequent in a few spots. But soon there were even nicer things to see in the quarries, including *Helianthemum nummularium* (Common Rock-rose) and *H. oelandicum* (Hoary Rock-rose) for easy comparison, *Clinopodium acinos* (Basil-thyme) and *Geranium sanguineum* (Bloody Cranesbill). New to most in the group was *Bromus hordeaceus* subsp. *ferronii* (Soft Brome), a diminutive coastal form of the more widespread plant, and there was also some *Centaurea scabiosa* (Greater Knapweed) in a mix of forms, some being the entire-leaved var. *succisifolia*.

Ascending by a slightly awkward path up onto the headland, we found – as promised – *Scilla verna* in full flower, and forming delightful sheets of blue (with two variant plants also found, with pink and white flowers, respectively). Here too were the small annuals *Trifolium ornithopodioides* (Bird’s-foot Clover) and *T. striatum* (Knotted Clover).



The route out of the quarries demanded careful footwork!

On our way down to Culver Hole, we found *Asplenium marinum* (Sea Spleenwort) on the rocks, and then had a very pleasant extended lunch in the company of *Asparagus prostratus* (Wild Asparagus). This species, first discovered in Glamorgan at this site in 1821, is very thinly scattered around the coasts of S Wales, SW England and SE Ireland, and in our vice-county is currently known from only three sites. Unfortunately, the population at Culver Hole is now hanging on by a thread, with just two plants found in very dry, rocky and somewhat trampled ground. Despite a lengthy search by many members of the group, no plants could be found on the better-vegetated slopes above, where an effort at re-introduction had previously been made.



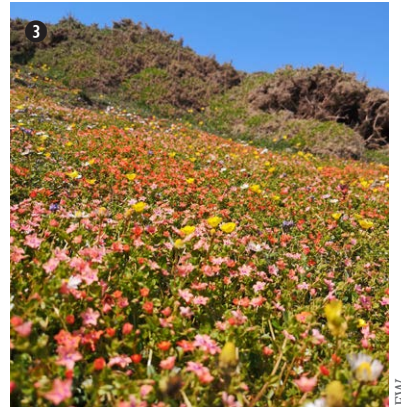
Left: David cuts the cake he baked to celebrate our 10th anniversary. Right: One of the plants of *Asparagus prostratus*, growing with *Armeria maritima* (Thrift) but very little else.

The next task was a search for another Gower speciality, *Ononis reclinata* (Small Restharrow). A scouting party found a couple of plants that could be approached without too much risk of falling over the cliffs, and a 'one-in-one-out' policy was adopted to ensure that everyone who wanted to had the chance to inspect this tiny species safely.

As in other areas of short, parched vegetation that we saw on this day, the perennial species *Sedum album* (White Stonecrop) was often abundant. This was a concern, as it seems to be on the increase here, perhaps favoured by long dry spells of recent years. It may be relevant that, in our area, it's probably an archaeophyte (a long-established introduction) and not native.



The more intrepid members of the group look for *Ononis reclinata* above Culver Hole! A small number of plants were found growing close to the cliff-edge, here shown amongst *Sedum album* (White Stonecrop). Note the sticky hairs and strongly toothed ends to the leaflets.



Botanising at Overton Mere: Karen, Kat and Caroline search for *Veronica spicata* at its previously known site ❶; the diminutive form of *Leucanthemum vulgare* (Oxeye Daisy) ❷, of which Stace says that “many segregates have been described at species and subspecies level [but] it is premature to present a workable scheme”; swathes of *Lysimachia arvensis* ❸; *Euphrasia tetraquetra* (Western Eyebright) ❹; and *Salvia verbenaca* (Wild Clary) ❺.



KW

We then headed round to the slopes on the W side of Overton Mere, where we saw vast swathes of *Lysimachia arvensis* (Scarlet Pimpernel), some patches with distinctly paler flowers than others, and some other classic Gower plants (pictured above). However, a previously known site for *Veronica spicata* (Spiked Speedwell) was searched carefully, to no avail.

Heading downslope and a little further round the headland, we were delighted to come across *Viola lactea* (Pale Dog Violet), with a good spread of plants along the SW margin of a ~20 m square of recently cleared gorse. It was last recorded in this area (but not this exact spot) in 2009, again in an area of cleared gorse.

We then headed back, on the way spotting a small amount of *Hippocrepis comosa* (Horseshoe Vetch) on the rocks, and a white form of *Orchis mascula* (Early Purple Orchid) by the footpath.



TR

Viola lactea looking very fine at Overton Mere, showing its long-leaved rosettes.



CN

A striking white-flowered form of *Orchis mascula*.

Taking a shortcut through the caravan park, we saw *Fumaria capreolata* (White Ramping Fumitory), and then investigated short turf in the car park and nearby. Here, a further array of interesting species was found, including the alien *Oxalis articulata* (Pink Sorrel), *Trifolium micranthum* (Least Yellow Trefoil), more *T. ornithopodioides* and *T. scabrum*, rosettes of *Spiranthes spiralis* (Autumn Ladies' Tresses), and the county rarity *Poa bulbosa* (Bulbous Meadow Grass), the latter discovered here in 2014.

With the time approaching 4pm, we then set off on the journey home, all agreeing that it had been a highly enjoyable and memorable day.

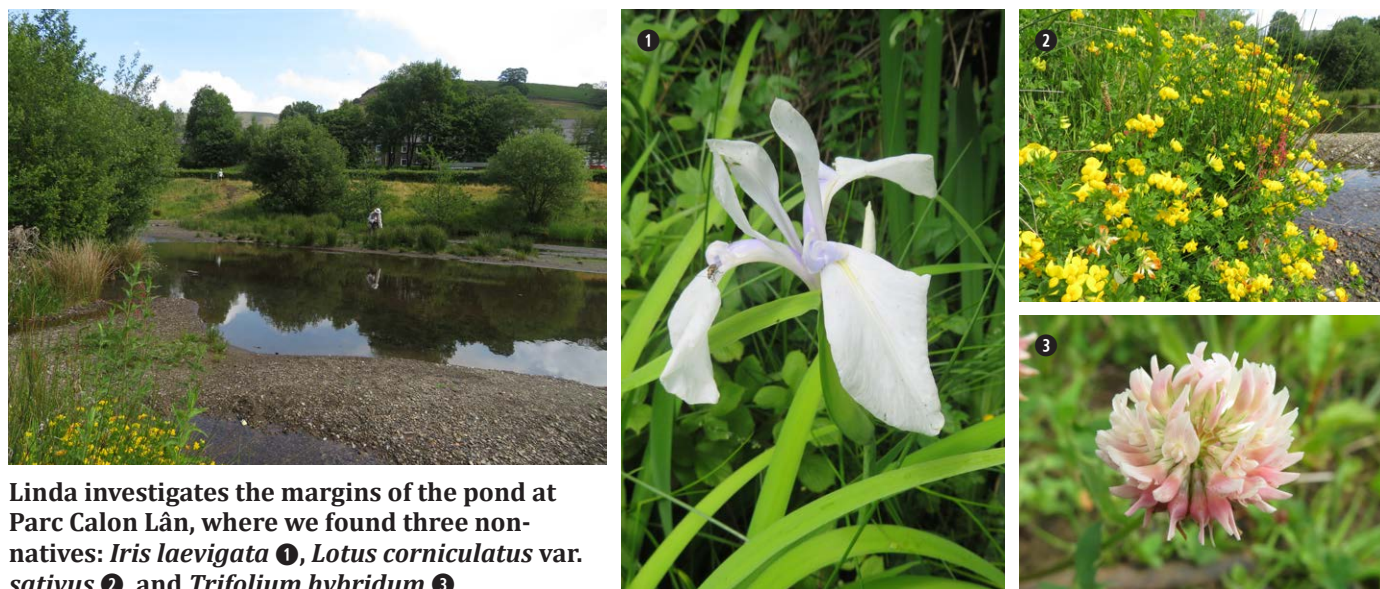


Left: *Oxalis articulata* at the top end of Port-Eynon car park. Middle: The group examining short turf to the S of the car park. Right: The pale pink flowers of the annual *Trifolium ornithopodioides* found in this latter site.

Blaengarw – Sunday 11 June

Starting off in Parc Calon Lân, we introduced members to some of the more common species on the banks around the car park, before heading down to the lake, which provided plenty of interest, not least in its Willows. As well as *Salix cinerea* (Grey Willow), *S. viminalis* (Osier), *S. purpurea* (Purple Willow) and *S. fragilis* (Crack Willow), Tim identified *S. × holosericea* (Silky-leaved Osier), the hybrid between *S. viminalis* and *S. cinerea*.

Hybrids were also of interest in the shape of the little-recorded *Nasturtium × sterile* (Hybrid Watercress), the cross between the two native British species, which was formerly the cultivated type. *Carex laevigata* (Smooth-stalked Sedge) and *C. spicata* (Spiked Sedge) were also nice to see, but the real surprise was *Iris laevigata* (Smooth-leaved Iris), the second record for Glamorgan and indeed



Linda investigates the margins of the pond at Parc Calon Lân, where we found three non-natives: *Iris laevigata* ❶, *Lotus corniculatus* var. *sativus* ❷, and *Trifolium hybridum* ❸.

for the whole of Wales. Here too was *Trifolium hybridum* (Alsike Clover), and a robust *Lotus* that caused some conversation, with the conclusion being that it was *L. corniculatus* (Common Bird's-foot Trefoil) var. *sativus*.

Heading upstream, by the path we encountered *Pinus contorta* (Lodgepole Pine), frequent in the NW Valleys but on the edge of its range here, and unknown to most in the group. A more surprising find in the adjacent rough grassland was *Festuca filiformis* (Fine-leaved Sheep's Fescue), which becomes only the fourth vice-county record, hot on the heels of our discovery of this species at Cosmeston Country Park in 2022. Also in this grassland were two 'dandelion jobs' that have had an increasing number of records in the vice-county in recent years: some probable *Hieracium lepiduloides* (Irregular-toothed Hawkweed) and *Pilosella praealta* (Tall Mouse-ear Hawkweed). There were also numerous plants of a puzzling *Carex* that turned out to be *C. distans* (Distant Sedge). Typically a plant of the coast, this might have arrived here in imported soil or as a seed-mix contaminant.



One of the plants of *Festuca filiformis* we found, its somewhat scruffy appearance belying its rarity in the vice-county.



The group examine the specimen of *Pinus contorta*, with distinctive features being its twisted leaves and long prickles on the end of its cone-scales.



Emerging briefly onto Pwllcarn Terrace, we straight away headed S along a track, with typical species of acid ground much in evidence on the banks above us. But nearby, on flatter coal-spoil, there was a different mix, with *Rhinanthus minor* subsp. *minor* (Hayrattle) and *Briza media* (Quaking Grass) being two unexpected components.



Galium saxatile (Heath Bedstraw, left) and *Hypericum pulchrum* (Upright St-John's-wort, right) were locally abundant above the track.



The group stop for lunch by the Nant Gwinau.

Lunch by a stream produced the local species *Lysimachia tenella* (Bog Pimpernel), *Oreopteris limbosperma* (Lemon-scented Fern) and *Jasione montana* (Sheep's-bit). After this, we headed into the forestry, where we found a convincing specimen of *Dryopteris cambrensis* or *D. affinis* subsp. *cambrensis* (Narrow Scaly Male Fern), depending on personal preference and how well you've been keeping up with name changes between Stace 2, 3 and 4.

Heading along a narrow path into the forestry, we cautiously approached an area that was reported as being on fire on Friday night. Large areas amongst the trees had indeed been reduced to ashes, but further up towards the crags, enough ground by the paths and in the rockier areas had escaped the flames to make botanising worthwhile.



Found in the forestry was a plant approaching the 'upland' form of *Potentilla erecta* (Tormentil) known as subsp. *strictissima*. The strongly divided leaflets, often larger petals, and longer fruiting pedicels are all claimed to enable it to be distinguished from the commonly found subsp. *erecta*, but the situation with plants in our area has not been worked out.



Botanising on the crags of Darren Fawr. Left: Emerging out of the burnt forestry on what turned out to be a well-trodden path. Middle: Charles and Tim considering the colony of *Hieracium austrinum*. Right: *Jasione montana* (Sheep's-bit) and *Umbilicus rupestris* (Navelwort) on the rocks.

One of these was *Hieracium austrinum* (Fang-toothed Hawkweed), which apart from its excellent common name, is a rare native species of acid cliff habitats in south Wales, and is only the third vice-county record. We kept an eye out for *Dryopteris oreades* (Mountain Male Fern) on the cliffs, but had to make do with some stunted *D. filix-mas* (Male Fern).

We then headed down the slope back to Parc Calon Lan via stony tracks, woodland edge and bracken, finding on the way *Carlina vulgaris* (Carline Thistle) and a couple of *Cotoneaster* species, courtesy of Tim.

Back by the river, a typical mix of ruderals and rough grassland species was encountered, including *Pastinaca sativa* (Wild Parsnip) and two non-natives, *Rosa multiflora* (Many-flowered Rose) and *Valerianella carinata* (Keel-fruited Cornsalad) – the latter now a common find in many urban areas in Glamorgan. To end the day, two nice finds were *Carex riparia* (Greater Pond Sedge) and a large population of *Lathyrus nissolia* (Grass Vetchling) on a grassy bank. Both species are scarce in the Valleys, and the *Carex* is a new hectad record.



Top: *Rosa multiflora* can become naturalised from plantings, and remarkably this is only the fifth localised record for this species in the v.c. Bottom left: *Carex riparia*. Bottom right: *Lathyrus nissolia*; at this time of year its crimson flowers have been replaced by pea-like pods, but in combination with its grass-like leaves, identification becomes easy!

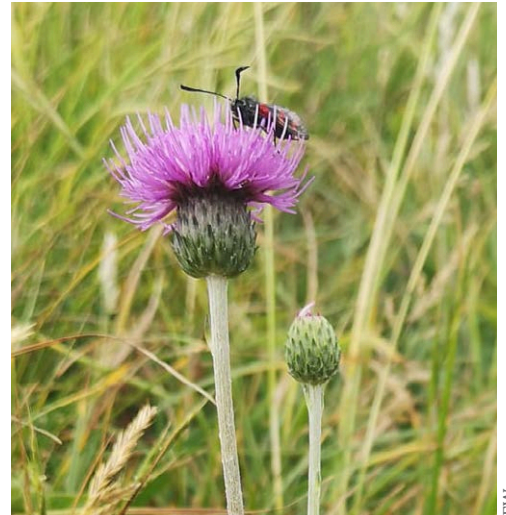
Nash Point & Vale coast – Sunday 9 July

On this excursion, our aim was to undertake a census of one species – *Cirsium tuberosum* (Tuberous Thistle), and its hybrids with *C. acaule* (Dwarf Thistle) (= *C. × medium*), and *C. palustre* (Marsh Thistle) (= *C. × semidecurrans*).

C. tuberosum is assessed as Vulnerable in Wales, and its populations on the coast of Glamorgan, between Southerndown and St Donats, represent one of only two strongholds in the UK, the other being Wiltshire. It has not been comprehensively surveyed since 2002, when Kevin Walker from the BSBI assessed the size and distribution of the population in the Vale,¹ and we thought it really was time to see how it is currently faring. Our target area was Monknash Coast SSSI, and two units of this SSSI were surveyed, Cwm Marcross and Cwm Nash.



A good-sized patch of *C. tuberosum*.



Inflorescences of (top) *C. tuberosum* and (bottom) *C. × semidecurrans*.

First, we reviewed how we might distinguish the hybrids: *The New Flora of the British Isles*² suggests *C. × medium* can be distinguished from either parent by the presence of two types of hairs on the underside of the leaves – jointed (from *C. acaule*) and web-like (from *C. tuberosum*). It is female-fertile so can backcross to *C. tuberosum*. *C. × semidecurrans*, on the other hand, is less well-described, and is intermediate in leaf, stem and capitulum characters. It is infertile. These features were used in the field to separate *C. tuberosum* from these two hybrids.

1. Walker KJ (2002). *Cirsium tuberosum* (L.) All. in Glamorgan, 2002. Centre for Ecology and Hydrology.

2. Stace C (2019). *New Flora of the British Isles* (4th edition). C&M Floristics.

Suitable habitat in and around the previous locations was checked, and ad hoc searches were made of other suitable habitat seen. All true *C. tuberosum* plants and its hybrids were recorded. Counting plants is perceived to be a straightforward task, but can be surprisingly challenging! Distinguishing where one plant ends and another starts is tricky, especially since some *C. tuberosum* plants may produce many rosettes, which can appear unconnected or may appear as one large clump! We developed a decision rule after some procrastination – plants were considered part of the same patch if the distance between them was less than 1 m. As well as counting the number of plants, we also recorded the size of each patch, along with the number of flowering stems present.

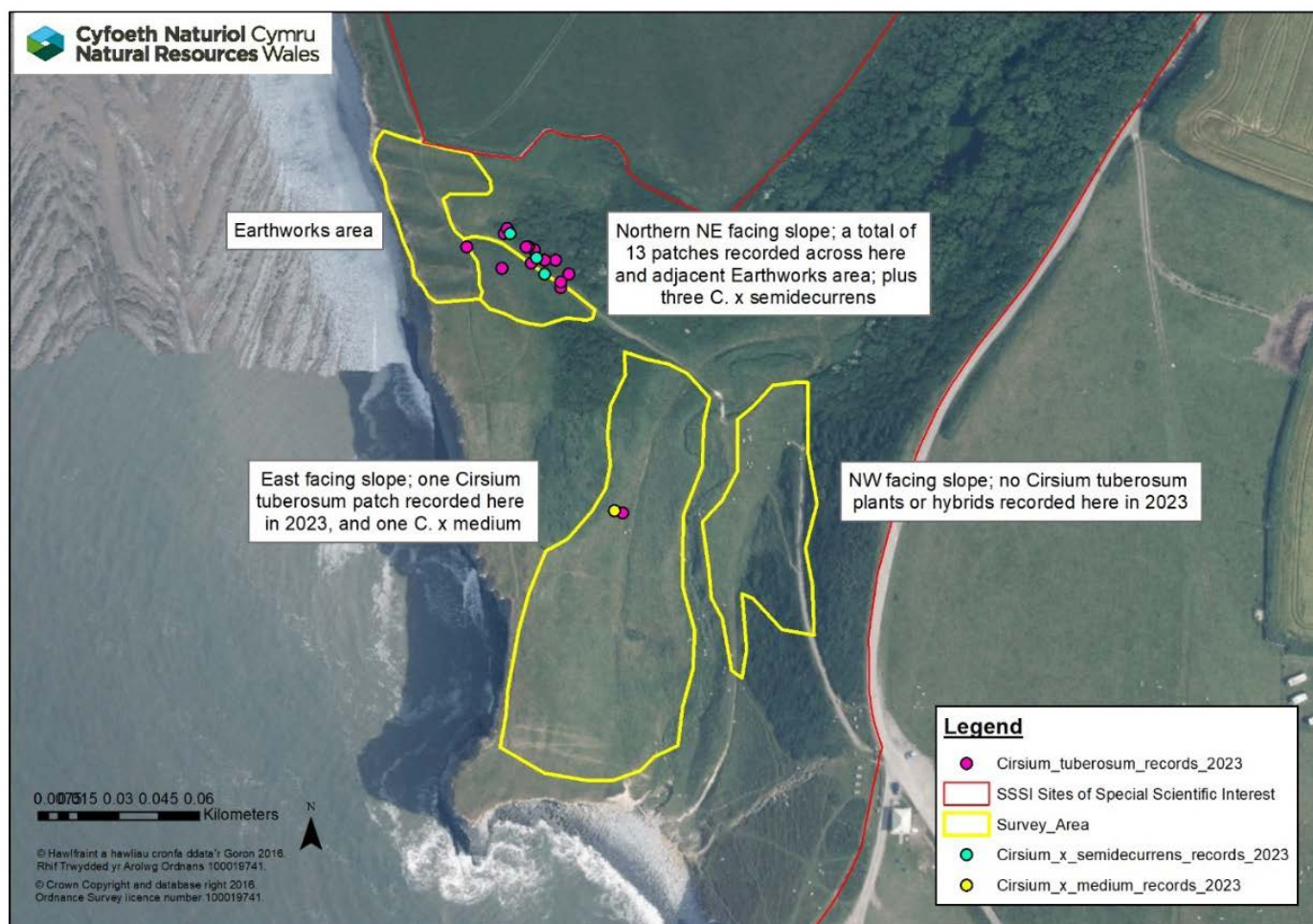
The results were:

Cwm Marcross

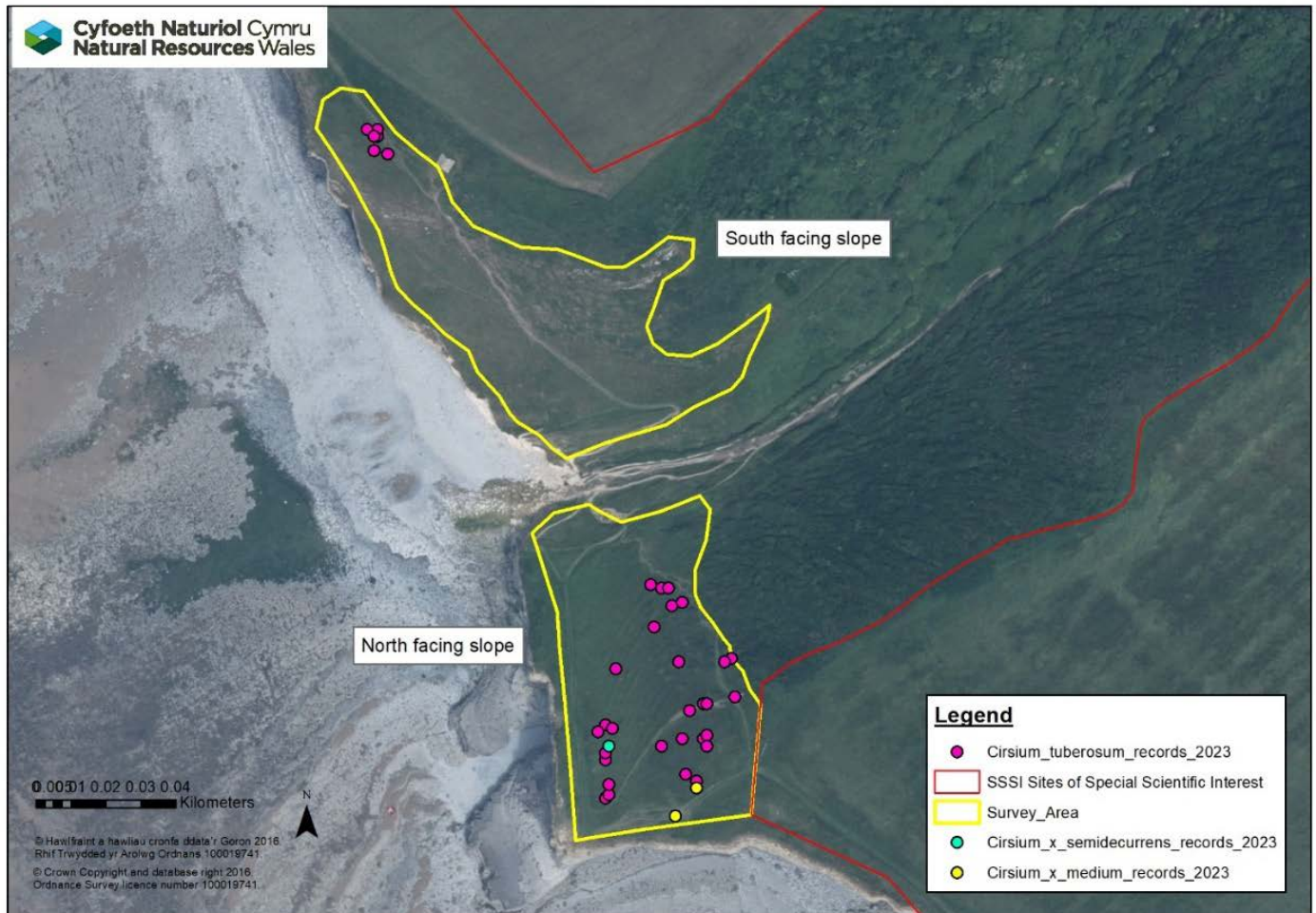
- A total of 13 patches of *C. tuberosum* was recorded around the area of the northern NE-facing slope and the northern earthworks. In addition, three patches of *C. × semidecurrans* were also recorded from this area.
- One patch of *C. × medium* and one patch of *C. tuberosum* were recorded from the E-facing slope.
- No *C. tuberosum* plants or either of the hybrids were seen on the NW-facing slope.

Cwm Nash

- A total of 37 patches of *C. tuberosum* were recorded, of which 32 were located on the N-facing slope. A new location of five patches was noted on the S-facing slope.
- One patch of *C. × semidecurrans* and two patches of *C. × medium* were also recorded.



A map showing the locations of *C. tuberosum* plants and hybrids at Cwm Marcross, Monkash Coast SSSI, 2023. Note: All the locations from the northern NE-facing slope and earthworks have shifted to the NW, due to GPS issues. All should lie S of the path shown on the aerial image.



A map showing the locations of *C. tuberosum* plants and hybrids at Cwm Nash, Monk Nash Coast SSSI, 2023.

Comparison with older surveys was the next challenge! This is difficult, in part as plant locations were recorded with lower levels of accuracy, and partly as outlined above, individual plants are hard to distinguish. As a result, only broad comparisons can be made with regard to population size, and instead greater emphasis is placed on changes in distribution instead.

Our 2023 distribution at Cwm Marcross is broadly comparable with the 2002 survey,² with similar number of patches recorded. But there is some suggestion of a decline in population size since a previous survey in 1988. The broad distribution across three of the long-known locations – on the earthworks, on the northern NE-facing slope and on the main E-facing slope – has been maintained. However, no plants were recorded on the NW-facing slope in 2023, where small numbers were seen in 1988, 1993 and 2002.

At Cwm Nash, a large number of plants/clumps were recorded on the N-facing slope – and we considered that the statement made in 1993 regarding this location³ – “second only to Nash Lighthouse Meadow both in terms of numbers of plants and the area over which they are distributed” – continues to be the case. In addition, we discovered a new colony towards the top of the S-facing slope, on the opposite side of the valley. This slightly increases the NW distribution of *C. tuberosum* within this unit, and within the SSSI.

A number of sources, including the *BSBI Plant Atlas*,⁴ state hybridisation as a major risk to the future of *C. tuberosum*, although the *Flora of Glamorgan*⁵ records *C. × medium* as being found along the

3. Norman G (1993). A baseline survey of *Cirsium tuberosum* in South Wales Region.

4. Stroh P *et al.* (2020). *BSBI Plant Atlas 2020: Cirsium tuberosum* (L.) All. See also the [online edition](#).

5. Wade AE, Kay QON, Ellis RG & the National Museum of Wales (1994). *Flora of Glamorgan*. The Natural History Museum.

stretch of coastline from Southerndown to St Donat's since at least 1935, and *C. × semidecurrens* since 1932. In 2023, the frequency of occurrence of hybrids appears to be low within both units. However, given the concern over hybridisation in Wiltshire populations, it would be sensible to remain vigilant to this threat.

All of our records have been fed into the BSBI Database, and have been used to record the condition of this SSSI feature. A small number of other interesting species were also recorded during our visit, including *Hippocrepis comosa* (Horseshoe Vetch) and *Campanula glomerata* (Clustered Bellflower).



Four of our group of seven botanists examine the population of *C. tuberosum* on the S-facing slope of Cwm Nash.



A fine specimen of *Campanula glomerata*, which like *C. tuberosum* is confined in Glamorgan to the coast between Southerndown and St Donats.



Hippocrepis comosa shows the strings of horseshoe-shaped seeds that give it its common name.

Cwmbach, Aberdare – Saturday 12 August

The forecast on this day was not brilliant, and the weather duly obliged – although bright to start, spells of thick drizzle and rain soon set in, and lasted for the rest of the day. This largely put paid to ideas of doing extensive recording or searching for clubmosses as planned, but our group of six botanists nevertheless made a good effort to see some of the highlights of the area, in the very knowledgeable company of local naturalist Mark Evans.



Moderately well-grazed grassland above Cwmbach held the locally-distributed glandular eyebright *Euphrasia pratensis* subsp. *pratensis* (left), and nice clumps of *Erica cinerea* (above), which in Glamorgan is frequent on the W half of the coalfield and the Gower coast, but is scarce or absent elsewhere.

Ascending up the Cefnpennar Road, we found a patch of *Rosa rubiginosa* (Sweet Briar), only the second hectad record. Then, continuing along a track into good-quality grassland, we saw thinly scattered *Euphrasia officinalis* subsp. *pratensis* (Rostkov's Eyebright), with *Erica cinerea* (Bell Heather) also present. On the bank by the track, there was a small quantity of *Jasione montana* (Sheep's-bit) and *Thymus drucei* (Wild Thyme), the latter scarce in the Valleys, although more frequent around Merthyr Tydfil.



One benefit of being accompanied by Mark was his detailed knowledge of sites and plants on his 'local patch'. A good example was this single clump of *Thymus drucei*, which he said he has known for many years, and which we would otherwise easily have missed!

Further up, we started to see patches of *Campanula rotundifolia* (Harebell), which is uncommon in the Valleys, including a few patches of white flowers (and one an intermediate shade). At our lunch spot on some quarry spoil, we spotted two plants of *Cystopteris fragilis* (Brittle Bladder Fern), which is restricted in Glamorgan to the N Valleys, but in this case was only a few hundred metres E of a similarly small and previously known colony.

Moving into forestry, David spotted a little *Dryopteris carthusiana* (Narrow Buckler Fern) in scrubby ground that formerly had been clear-felled, and further on, *Oreopteris limbosperma* (Lemon-scented Fern) in a ditch. The weather by now was deteriorating further, so we did not linger long on descending through the dense forestry above Werfa Colliery. However, we did collect a *Hieracium* for Tim Rich to determine, which turned out to be the common *H. sabaudum* (Autumn Hawkweed), and were pleased to see *Wahlenbergia hederacea* (Ivy-leaved Bellflower), *Carex laevigata* (Smooth-stalked Sedge) and two plants of *Epipactis helleborine* (Broad-leaved Helleborine) – hardly rare species, but nice to see nonetheless.



Top: One of the plants of *Cystopteris fragilis*, in a hollow between blocks. Bottom: the underside of a pinna, showing the bladder-like spore-cases that give the plant its common name.



The nice show of regular-coloured *Campanula rotundifolia* in one of the higher pastures, and (inset) the striking white-flowered form.



One of the two fine plants of *Epipactis helleborine* seen on our way back to Cwmbach.

Sarn, Bridgend – Saturday 16 September

Frequent spells of light showery rain gave a definite end-of-season feel to this excursion, although this didn't prevent our group of 11 from doing plenty of useful recording in the urban fringe on the N side of Bridgend.

Starting from Sarn Railway Station, we almost immediately encountered the non-natives *Pilosella praealta* (Tall Mouse-ear Hawkweed) and *P. aurantiaca* (Fox-and-Cubs), along with the native *P. officinarum* (Common Mouse-ear Hawkweed), with the former seemingly on the rise in our area. Navigating road junctions and cycleways led us southwards into more open, damp but unmanaged habitat, with a few typical species of damp grassland. However, it was dismayingly dominated by invasive species, primarily *Impatiens glandulifera* (Himalayan Balsam) and *Reynoutria japonica* (Japanese Knotweed), but with *Aegopodium podagraria* (Ground Elder) and *R. × bohemica* (Bohemian Knotweed) thrown in for good measure.



Lathyrus sylvestris with its clusters of pea-like pods.



A hybrid would have been nice – but *Stachys palustris* (left) and *S. sylvatica* (right) clearly weren't in the mood for an inter-species relationship.



For anyone who feels that the infamously invasive *Reynoutria japonica* is lacking in the height department, then say hello to its hybrid with *R. sachalinensis* (Giant Knotweed), *R. × bohemica*, here forming a 9 ft-high tidal wave. As Tim Rich demonstrated, the weakly cordate bases to the leaves and the presence of hairs on the leaf underside serve to distinguish it from its parents.

Arriving at the Rhyd Lane Bridge, we found a few typical species of old walls, and nearby spotted *Senecio squalidus* (Oxford Ragwort) and *Lathyrus sylvestris* (Narrow-leaved Everlasting Pea), along with *Cochlearia danica* (Danish Scurvy-grass) presumably dispersed from the M4 bridge looming above us.

To the S, the E bank of the River Ogmore yielded a few woodland species, including *Carpinus betulus* (Hornbeam) and *Bromopsis ramosa* (Hairy Brome), neither being common in the v.c.

Crossing the river, the riverside path adjacent to Glanrhyd Hospital yielded *Epilobium tetragonum* (Square-stalked Willowherb) and *Senecio viscosus* (Sticky Groundsel), and the spectacle of Tim wading along the river's edge to confirm *Zantedeschia aethiopica* (Alta-lily) as one of the few v.c. records this century! Towards the S end of the path were not one but two pairs of plants in close proximity but annoyingly without any evidence of their hybrids – *Stachys palustris* (Marsh Woundwort) and *S. sylvatica* (Hedge Woundwort), and *Hypericum perforatum* (Perforate St John's-wort) and *H. maculatum* (Imperforate St John's-wort). Not far away, an enterprising female *Humulus lupulus* (Hop) was ascending the stay-wire of a telegraph pole!



Humulus lupulus reaches for the skies...



Today's the day the botanists have their picnic! A remarkably civilised lunch break in Pen-y-fai, courtesy of the organisers of an outside meal for soft toys earlier in the week (who had, somewhat distressingly, not only strung up the attendees on the overhanging tree, but then left them to soak in the rain).

A bizarre lunch-stop (see photo) was followed by the opportunity to get familiar with a few roadside weeds on our way to Pen-y-fai church, which produced a reasonable list of 28 species.

A short distance to the N was a solitary plant of *Epilobium roseum* (Pale Willowherb), which was probably the highlight of the route N to Ty'n-y-garn. There, the large area of damp grassland in the triangle formed by the road

junction was rather uniform over large areas, but we were pleased to see *Mentha × piperita* (Peppermint) in a ditch. Neither parent was in the immediate vicinity, but curiously both were present (without the hybrid) about 100 m away, in a rectangular area of damp grassland enclosed by scrub. This also yielded four species of *Juncus* (Rush) and ~30 plants of *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* (Common Spotted Orchid).



The close-cropped turf at All Saints' Church in Pen-y-fai was dominated over large areas by *Veronica officinalis* (Heath Speedwell). It must have been quite a sight earlier in the year if it had been allowed to flower!



Mentha aquatica (Water Mint, left) and *M. spicata* (Spear Mint, centre) can occasionally give rise to *M. × piperita* (right), but the glabrous nature of the plant we found suggests it arose as a garden escape. As well as the smell, the cylindrical but slightly tapering flower-head is diagnostic.

Proceeding northward through Aberkenfig on our way back to the cars, we clocked up the neophyte *Rosa multiflora* (Many-flowered Rose) just S of the M4, to add to our record made in May. There was lots of *Verbena officinalis* (Vervain) at one spot, and further on we had the increasingly commonly-seen *Polypogon viridis* (Water Bent), along with *Galinsoga quadriradiata* (Shaggy Soldier) and *Echinochloa crus-galli* (Cockspur).



Left: *Verbena officinalis* was plentiful in a scruffy car-park in Aberkenfig. Right: There was some *Galinsoga quadriradiata* in pavement cracks on the main street.

Finally, we stopped briefly at Llansantffraid church in Sarn, a rural-feeling spot amongst the noise of the modern-day roads and railways. There, we added a few grassland species to our list for the day, along with two surprises nearby – a large tree of *Pyrus communis* (Pear) with small, hard fruits, and *Clinopodium ascendens* (Common Calamint), as only the first and second hectad records, respectively.



The decorative seed-heads of *Leontodon hispidus* (Rough Hawkbit) were spotted in the grounds of Llansantffraid church.



***Clinopodium ascendens* is distinguished from *C. nepeta* (Lesser Calamint) by the hairs in the calyx-tube not protruding beyond it, and by the length of the calyx-teeth.**

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