

Glamorgan Botany Group

2017 Excursion Report

With the end of the BSBI's date-class inching closer, our six excursions this year all focused on 1km squares with precisely zero post-2000 records in the BSBI's database, and over the course of our visits we recorded plants in 24 of these squares. As always, it is difficult to pick highlights, but April's *Ceratochloa carinata* (California Brome) and September's *Juncus foliosus* (Leafy Rush) certainly rank among the most significant discoveries... although those preferring plants with less 'specialist appeal' may have chosen the fine display of *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* (Southern Marsh Orchid) in June or the array of bog plants in July and September! Of course, we're always sharing tips on plant identification, and this year provided plenty of opportunities to do that too – so if you want to get to know Glamorgan's plants better, then keep an eye out for our 2018 excursion plan, which we'll send round in February.

David Barden, Karen Wilkinson and Julian Woodman

Barry – Saturday 22 April

On a bright, sunny, warm day, 10 botanists met to explore the open spaces in and around the old villages of Cadoxton and Merthyr Dyfan, now well within the urban area of Barry.

Starting in a small area of grassland next to our meeting point, we found a few species of interest including *Medicago arabica* (Spotted Medick), *Lactuca virosa* (Great Lettuce), and *Papaver lecoqii* (Yellow-juiced Poppy, identified by its yellow sap). Moving into Victoria Park (shown on old maps as Cadoxton Common), we found a good range of species of short grassland, with pale-flowered *Geranium molle* (Dove's-foot Cranesbill) resulting in an examination of the characteristics separating it from *G. pusillum* (Small-flowered Cranesbill). Also in this area were *Malva neglecta* (Dwarf Mallow), *Myosotis ramossissima* (Early Forget-me-not) and *Valerianella carinata* (Keeled Cornsalad) – the latter being reasonably frequent on pavements and similar places later in the day.

A short section of green lane leading down to Coldbrook Road East was another reminder of the area's history before urbanisation, and provided a selection of rough grassland species, although further on, Cadoxton churchyard was rather closely mown and of little interest. In a similar vein, the open area known as Cassey Common appeared to be ungrazed, and its rather rank grassland did



In Victoria Park, flowery south-facing banks with typical species of short dry grassland were found, including abundant *Sherardia arvensis* (Field Madder, top) and *Geranium molle*, including a pale-flowered form (bottom).



Cassey Common had a pleasantly 'rural' feel to it, but the species count was rather limited.

not detain us long. Looping round through nearby estates, we added a few weedy roadside species, but the surprise find of the day was *Ceratochloa carinata* (California Brome) on the south side of Cowbridge Road, with numerous clumps over several square metres – only the second vice-county record!

We had lunch in a former quarry known as Little Hill Common, where we spoke to a resident interested in its flora, for which we did a quick listing. *Sison amomum* (Stone Parsley) was perhaps the most interesting species here, while the leaves of *Lunaria annua* (Honesty) caused some initial puzzlement.



Testament to Tim's identification skills was this colony of *Ceratochloa carinata*!

Heading north-west, Julian spotted a steep bank within the grounds of a bungalow on Pencoedre Road with *Bromopsis erecta* (Upright Brome) and *Galium verum* (Ladies Bedstraw), and although the nearby playing fields were rather dull, the mown verges of St Bride's Way had more *Sherardia arvensis* and a single rosette of *Cirsium eriophorum* (Woolly Thistle) – probably destined to be forever vegetative. The slopes just to the north were perhaps the most interesting site of the day, with patches of reasonably species-rich grassland intermingled with woodland. *Linum bienne* (Pale Flax) was frequent on a steep bank, while a substantial clump of vegetative *Clinopodium vulgare* (Cushion Calamint) caused initial confusion with *Oreganum vulgare* (Marjoram) – a consequence of botanising earlier in the year than normal! Here too was *Crepis biennis* (Rough Hawksbeard) and an abundance of *Equisetum telmateia* (Great Horsetail), with *Hypericum hirsutum* (Hairy St John's-wort) and *Ajuga reptans* (Bugle) in the woodland, and massed seedlings of *Sison amomum*. On the edge of a concreted track we found *Barbarea intermedia* (Medium-flowered Wintercress), which has very few records for the vice-county.

Emerging on to Skomer Road, we stopped for a well-earned ice-cream, before descending into the valley of Merthyr Dyfan, where a rather ugly concrete weir was in the process of being constructed. Reminders of the old landscape were then our focus, including a fragment of streamside woodland, the surroundings



Tim Rich (left) and Julian (right) examining the population of *Barbarea intermedia*.



Viola reichenbachiana with variegated petals was a curious find in Merthyr Dyfan cemetery, growing in sparsely-vegetated turf under the trees.

of the church, and the (deeply shaded) lane up towards the cemetery, with a reasonable list of species being generated. In the cemetery itself, Julian and Paul Robinson headed off to a far corner to uncover an area with calcareous species including *Plantago media* (Hoary Plantain), while the rest of us took it easy near the entrance, noting abundant *Viola reichenbachiana* (Early Dog-Violet) with mottled white-and-purple flowers.

With time pressing and our energy flagging, we now headed fairly swiftly back through suburban roads and back-streets, seeing at one point *Erodium maritimum* (Sea Storks-bill) and a handful of wall ferns in a few places to complete a rewarding day.

Cwm Cwic, Brynna – Saturday 20 May

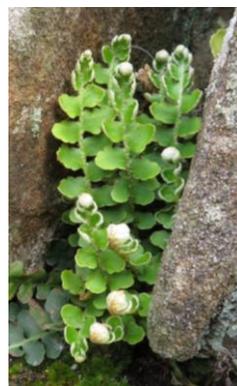
A record 19 plant enthusiasts gathered at Brynna on a cool and showery day to investigate the flora of tracks and paths to the north of the village. With this number of people, we were grateful for the line of an old tramway providing an interesting mix of habitats and plants to introduce many of the group to the characteristics of various common species. Ground-dwelling ferns, *Ranunculus* (Buttercups) and *Trifolium* (Clovers) were particular focus points, and indeed *T. medium* (Zigzag Clover) was quite frequent along the verges of this track. Breaking off up-slope for lunch, David spotted the few-flowered racemes of *Trifolium micranthum* (Slender Trefoil) in short turf.



The 'crowd' investigating a dampish ditch along the line of the old tramway north of Brynna.



An inconspicuous species, *Trifolium micranthum* has relatively few records in the eastern half of Glamorgan, and may be overlooked here – this colony north of Brynna is the first for the hectad.



A farmyard wall held plenty of *Asplenium ceterach* with rather undulate-margined pinnules.

The track leading round the side of the hill had a nice mix of heathy species, with the addition of *Sanicula europaea* (Sanicle) and *Polystichum setiferum* (Soft Shield Fern) – both more commonly found on basic substrates. Also here was a fine selection of larger ferns for side-by-side comparison, and a minor variant of *Asplenium ceterach* (Rustyback).

Further round the hill, we found an area of south-facing short turf with *Carex caryophylla* (Spring Sedge), *Hypericum humifusum* (Trailing St John's-wort) and *Carlina vulgaris* (Carline Thistle), before dropping down into an excellent damp grassland site known to hold *Carum verticillatum* (Whorled Caraway). This was still here in small quantity, although it was too early in the year to be sure of the extent of the population. Most remarkable, though, was the variety of *Carex* (Sedge) species, with *C. binervis* (Green-ribbed), *demissa* (Common Yellow), *hostiana* (Tawny), *laevigata* (Smooth-stalked), *leporina* (Oval), *panicea* (Carnation), *paniculata* (Greater Tussock), *pendula* (Pendulous), *pilulifera* (Pill) and *remota* (Remote) providing ample opportunity to hone our skills with this group! We then headed down into damp often Alder-dominated woodland (Julian having earlier got permission to do so from the landowner), and although generally pleasant, we did not add many species to our list. The only point of note was a reasonable quantity of *Primula vulgaris* (Primrose) in damp woodland – far from being a common plant in the Valleys and Border ridges.



The *Carex*-rich grassland site west of Llanbad-fawr is one of the very few sites in East Glamorgan for *Carum verticillatum*, which here is associated with *Sphagnum* and other acid bog plants.

Fragaria vesca with lobed petals was an interesting find towards the end of the excursion.

The lane downhill to Brynna then provided an easy walk for the eight remaining members of the group, with points of interest including *Betonica officinalis* (Betony), a patch of *Adoxa moschatellina* (Moschatel), and a colony of *Fragaria vesca* (Wild Strawberry) with curiously lobed petals.

Treherbert to Treorchy – Sunday 25 June



Linaria repens was a nice find at Treherbert railway station, here in its typical habitat of old clinker.

Ten of us met up at Treherbert railway station in showery but improving weather for a day investigating the forestry on the west side of the valley down to Treorchy. Before that, though, we had some interesting waste ground to deal with, finding over 50 species in railside gravel. These included a dock that Julian determined as *Rumex crispus* (Curled Dock) × *R. obtusifolius* (Broad-leaved Dock), *Bromus diandra* (Great Brome), a suite of *Epilobium* species including the less-often-encountered *E. tetragonum* (Square-stalked Willowherb), and a fine population of *Linaria repens* (Pale Toadflax) in full flower, new to many in the group.

Crossing over the railway into the woodland, we quickly built up a good list of typical trackside species. Oaks have caused us identification problems previously, but on this occasion we were pretty satisfied with one tree as

Quercus robur (Pedunculate Oak) × *Q. petraea* (Sessile Oak). Further up there were typical species of heathland, including a small quantity of *Oreopteris limbosperma* (Lemon-scented Fern), as well as *Juncus squarrosus* (Heath Rush) and *Teucrium scorodonia* (Wood Sage). During lunch (where David demonstrated a range of previously collected *Equisetum* (Horsetail) species), Julian spotted some *Achillea ptarmica* (Sneezewort), while the more adventurous headed up to a rocky outcrop, although finding nothing exceptional here.

After a steep but short climb, we emerged suddenly onto a flat area at a bend in a broad forestry track. This was an excellent spot for botanising, with plenty of species of short gravelly turf. The outstanding feature of this track, for well over a mile, was locally abundant *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* (Southern Marsh Orchid), with a little *D. fuchsii* (Common Spotted Orchid) and some hybrid plants.



The group enjoying lunch in a sunny spell! Photo: Karen



The woodland track on the north-eastern flanks of Mynydd Tyle-coch was excellent for *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*, with (as is typical for orchids) a good deal of variation in size and form – including one plant with pale pink flowers amongst normal purple-flowered plants.



The three ferns previously aggregated under the name *Dryopteris affinis* (Scaly Male Fern) have a bit of a reputation as being difficult, but identification is usually straightforward. Left to right, in decreasing order of frequency in our region: *D. affinis* (Golden-scaled Male Fern – the ‘ordinary’ one), *D. borrieri* (Borrer’s Male Fern – with the ‘square-cut’ tips to the pinnules), and *D. cambrensis* (Narrow Male Fern – with the basal lobe on the lowest pinnule overlapping the main stem, and recurved teeth). Photos: Caroline.

Interesting plants then came thick and fast. Sue and Brian Dockerill pointed out the least-common member of the Scaly Male Fern set, *Dryopteris cambrensis* (Narrow Male Fern) – the first time we have found it on our excursions. Further down, highlights were *Epipactis helleborine* (Broad-leaved Helleborine), *Equisetum sylvaticum* (Wood Horsetail) and *E. fluviatile* (Water Horsetail). *Phragmites australis* (Common Reed) was rather unexpected, and *Wahlenbergia hederacea* (Ivy-leaved Bellflower), *Poa compressa* (Flattened Meadow Grass), *Carex pallescens* (Pale Sedge), *Bromus racemosus* (Smooth Brome) and *Isolepis setacea* (Bristle Club-rush) were also good to see. A dandelion with leaves 60cm long caused some amusement, although as Tim Rich pointed out, many species get pretty big later in the season, so sadly this was probably not anything special.



More highlights from the forestry track were (left to right): *Epipactis helleborine*, including one plant lacking chlorophyll (at left); a fine stand of the delicately-branched *Equisetum sylvaticum*; *E. fluviatile* in a couple of watery ditches; and a *Taraxacum* that, after careful consideration, we agreed was best named as 'that giant dandelion we got a photo of Julian standing next to'.

Turning off the track, we headed downhill into Treorchy through bracken-dominated grassland, made more interesting by some old quarries and (lower down) damp woodland. A footpath shortcut past the secondary school then yielded *Carex spicata* (Spiked Sedge) and *C. laevigata* (Smooth-stalked Sedge), followed by a few ruderal species on our way back to the railway station.

Pontycymer – Saturday 15 July

'Wet' hardly seems an adequate word to describe this rain-sodden trip to Pontycymer, but even without the weather, it was memorable for the excellent botanising and the hospitality of the landowners (who, taking pity on us, separately gifted us *two* waterproof hats!).

Anyway, our notebooks just about remained dry for the first five minutes, allowing the seven in our group to take notes of the plants near our meeting point on Church Street – with over 50 species being found on a steep grassy bank, retaining wall and in pavement cracks.



Wet but worthwhile – looking north from Gelli'r-onn Farm.

After a bit more side-street walking, anyone not wearing wellies was soon regretting their choice of footwear as (with permission from the very welcoming landowner) we headed into the species-rich fields belonging to Gelli'r-onn Farm. We spent longest in the fields north of the farm, where after passing through a fine population of *Serratula tinctoria* (Saw-wort) in some relatively dry ground, we saw a range of species typical of top-quality wet acid grassland. These included *Succisa pratensis* (Devil's-bit Scabious), *Scutellaria minor* (Lesser Skullcap), *Eriophorum angustifolium* (Common

Cottongrass), *Trichophorum germanicum* (Deergrass), *Narthecium ossifragum* (Bog Asphodel) and *Drosera rotundifolia* (Round-leaved Sundew). Two highlights were vast quantities of flowering *Anagallis tenella* (Bog Pimpernel), and a small quantity of *Salix repens* (Creeping Willow), but remarkably there was no *Wahlenbergia hederacea* (Ivy-leaved Bellflower) – normally a certainty in this habitat in the upland parts of v.c. 41.



A 6-foot-deep drainage ditch (left), deepened several years previously, but fortunately still not worthy of the name, exposes a thick layer of clay... the reason for the presence of sheets of *Anagallis tenella* (middle left), as well as *Scutellaria minor* (middle right), and *Drosera rotundifolia* with *Salix repens* (right)... amongst much else of interest.

At this point we were in need of some shelter, and the farmer very kindly invited us into the stone-floored kitchen of the old farmhouse and offered us cups of tea while we ate our lunch. Many members of the group then felt it was time to head back, so it was left to Julian, Karen and David to continue onwards to Fforch-wen, where permission had also been obtained to visit in advance.



The very narrow grey-green leaves of *Agrostis curtisii* were apparent from a distance. Photo: Karen

After another warm welcome by the landowners, we headed straight up to Moel Garn, passing through an area of short sheep-grazed turf containing *Euphrasia officinalis* subsp. *anglica* (English Eyebright), and further up some *Agrostis curtisii* (Bristle Bent). Our destination was a good area of quaking bog, where we saw *Eriophorum vaginatum* (Hare's-tail Cottongrass) as well as *Trichophorum germanicum* again. Passing back down through the farm and onto the access track, we saw a little *Carex pulicaris* (Flea Sedge)



The stickily-hairy *Senecio viscosus*, which we found as a pavement weed in Pontycymer village.

before we diverted off downhill through an area of very wet grassland, where we (finally) caught up with some *Wahlenbergia hederacea*. On the southern side of this stream was a mix of flushed grassland with drier slightly raised areas containing lichens and more *Agrostis curtisii*. Joining the track again, we saw *Jasione montana* (Sheep's-bit) on a steep bank, and, when nearly back at our cars, a small quantity of *Senecio viscosus* (Sticky Groundsel) to finish off.

Ynysybwl – Saturday 19 August

Meeting near the swimming pool in Buarth Capel, our group of ten set to work examining the flora of the grassy banks around the car-park. Features of four common *Epilobium* species were demonstrated, and indeed we had plenty of opportunity to practice our identification of this genus later in the day.

Walking north-west along the riverside path, we pondered on a mown, non-flowering *Veronica* with clear two lines of hairs on the stem but fairly well-developed petioles – we concluded that it was *V. chamedrys* (Germander Speedwell) ‘acting oddly’ rather than *V. montana* (Wood Speedwell), although shortly after we saw a convincing patch of the latter!

Our next stop was a heavily shaded quarry, filled with deep, stagnant watery mud and containing masses of *Myosotis scorpioides* (Water Forget-me-not), *Mentha aquatica* (Water Mint), *Persicaria hydropiper* (Water-pepper) and *Stachys palustris* (Marsh Woundwort) – although with scarcely any flowers between them.



David carefully investigated the margins of the flooded quarry in Buarth Capel, but the plant life of the central area had to be inspected from a distance!



By looking down over a wall, Brian somehow managed to spot a small colony of a multiply-forked *Asplenium trichomanes*!



In the car park of the Old Ynysybwl Inn, we found *Galeopsis tetrahit* – common enough generally, but nevertheless a striking plant – and *Mimulus moschatus*. The latter is distinguished from the various other *Mimulus* species and hybrids by being glandular-hairy all over, not just towards the top of the plant.

Arrival at the lane took us into a new monad, and here we again built up a good list of woodland and verge species, including plenty of *Mycelis muralis* (Wall Lettuce). Approaching the pub for lunch, Brian Dockerill’s instinct for ferns led him to discover a remarkable variant of *Asplenium trichomanes* (Maidenhair Spleenwort), and the car park also proved productive, with *Galeopsis tetrahit* (Common Hemp-Nettle), *Mimulus moschatus* (Musk), and a selection of *Juncus* (Rushes), compared-and-contrasted by Karen.

A grassy field gave us a rare opportunity to see three common ‘dandelion jobs’ growing side by side (see photo), as well as a few heathy species in less-improved



Karen demonstrating the key features of (left to right) *Leontodon hispidus* (Rough Hawkbit), *Scorzoneroides autumnalis* (Autumn Hawkbit) and *Hypochaeris radicata* (Common Cat's-ear).

Now back in the village, we headed along Other Street, notable not just for its curious name but for its eclectic collection of non-native garden escapes and throw-outs on its shaded verges, including *Solidago gigantea* (Early Golden-Rod).

Our next stop was the old Lady Windsor Colliery, where a highlight on the new cycleway was one bush of *Rosa rubiginosa* (Sweet-briar). The spoil itself was particularly diverse, due to the range in dampness of the ground. In areas of



Good botanising was had on the spoil of the former Lady Windsor Colliery.

turf at the far end. Plenty of *Luzula pilosa* (Hairy Wood-rush) was found in the wood beyond, and we then lingered in a damp rather overgrown field on the other side of the old railway, with abundant *Filipendula ulmaria* (Meadowsweet) and *Carex nigra* (Common Sedge).

A fine clump of *Sanguisorba officinalis* (Great Burnet) was a nice surprise on the track to Llechwen, and nearby we admired an old spoil-heap covered in *Calluna vulgaris* (Ling), with various heathy species on the margins.



The deep-red flowers of *Sanguisorba officinalis* are an uncommon sight in this part of the vice-county.



The colourful view from the top of the *Calluna*-covered spoil-heap on the Llechwen track.

standing water was abundant *Lythrum portula* (Water Purslane), plenty of the inconspicuous *Veronica scutellata* (Marsh Speedwell), two substantial patches of *Anagallis tenella* (Bog Pimpernel), and a little *Typha latifolia* (Reedmace). In contrast, the drier ground held nice species such as *Danthonia decumbens* (Heath Grass) and *Veronica officinalis* (Heath Speedwell), as well as a single plant of *Verbena officinalis* (Vervain, for which John receives due credit!). Finally, just before we turned back towards the village, Linda Nottage spotted a large colony of *Agrimonia odorata* (Fragrant

Agrimony). A walk back along the main road then finished the day off, with a few 'weeds' being picked up along the way.



Interesting finds on the old colliery spoil included (left to right): *Lythrum portula*; *Agrimonia odorata*, characteristically showing its hooked bristles at the near end of the fruits pointing backwards, and here proving highly effective on Karen's jumper); and the common alien *Juncus tenuis* (Slender Rush), but looking very strange here with its seed-masses swollen by recent rain.

Gelligaer – Sunday 20 September

With summer a distant memory and most plants now well past flowering, this excursion tested our powers of vegetative identification more than usual, but at least the promised rain held off, meaning that our group of 14 had a dry day to deal with the finer points of identifying withered basal rosettes and disintegrating seed-heads!



This may look like an ordinary boring road verge, but it is in fact some *Puccinellia distans* on an ordinary boring road verge – now a frequent habitat for this salt-tolerant species.

Just for once, the car park held little of interest, so we headed straight down the road, finding to our surprise the roadside halophyte *Puccinellia distans* (Reflexed Saltmarsh Grass), and a mass of *Eleocharis palustris* (Common Spike-rush).

Having previously obtained permission to visit Penrhiw Farm, we crossed a couple of 'improved' fields onto a long dampish field – this started off rather unpromising but gradually got better as we headed towards the south-east corner, with small quantities of heathy species and a little *Oreopteris limbosperma* (Lemon-scented Fern). A little dell provided a few typical woodland species and good examples of *Quercus robur* (Pedunculate Oak) and *Q. petraea* (Sessile Oak), demonstrated by Karen, while Tim found a little vegetative *Lathyrus linifolius* (Bitter Vetch) on a grassy bank, and a couple of fields further on David spotted some *Spergula arvensis* (Corn Spurrey).

The next field was more interesting, and although some of the vegetation was rather rank, in the middle of it we found a strange *Dryopteris* that was later confirmed by the BSBI referee as the hybrid between *D. dilatata* (Broad Buckler Fern) and *D. carthusiana* (Narrow Buckler Fern). On the banks of the nearby stream was plenty of *Hydrocotyle vulgaris* (Marsh Pennywort), and Lyn Evans spotted a little *Wahlenbergia hederacea* (Ivy-leaved Bellflower) still in flower.



Spargula arvensis (top) and *Campanula rotundifolia* (bottom) were two less-common species found at Penrhiw Farm.

We stopped for lunch on a dry bank, where small quantities of *Hypericum humifusum* (Trailing St. John's-wort), *Campanula rotundifolia* (Harebell) and *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum* (Black Spleenwort) were found. The fields on the way back to the road were then rather dull, with a colony of *Carex caryophyllea* (Spring Sedge) the only point of note.

On the great sheep-ridden expanse of Gelli-gaer Common, we initially headed briskly over towards the south-east boundary, where a couple of damp flushes held a few typical species. However, the ground beyond this point looked unpromising, so we turned north-east, crossed a steeply-sloping bracken-dominated gully, and then descended into a broad valley, where at last there was some good habitat (having wisely decided to steer clear of the party of local farmers carrying out shooting practice). In actual fact, we found parts of this area were excellent, with *Vaccinium oxycoccos* (Cranberry) being frequent in a few spots, as were the bog-grassland stalwarts *Narthecium ossifragum* (Bog Asphodel),



On the higher parts of Gelli-gaer Common, the sheep-resistant *Carduus nutans* (Musk Thistle) was one of the few conspicuous species.

Scutellaria minor (Lesser Skullcap), *Drosera rotundifolia* (Round-leaved Sundew), and of course *Wahlenbergia hederacea*, of which there was plenty (I make no apology for repeatedly mentioning this species – Wales does after all have a substantial proportion of the world population!). Further down we found a good colony of *Hypericum elodes* (Bog St John's-wort), and puzzled over *Mentha arvensis* (Corn Mint) with some untypically sharp sepal-teeth. However, the best was saved for last, when Tim pointed out a couple of plants of *Juncus foliosus* (Leafy Rush) – all too easily overlooked for its common cousin *J. bufonius* (Toad Rush), and one of only a handful of vice-county records.

With that, we headed back up to the road and back to the cars, to complete the year's botanising!



Looking north (or was it south, east or west?) from the best and dampest bit of Gelli-gaer Common, where we found (left to right) *Vaccinium oxycoccos*, *Hypericum elodes*, and *Juncus foliosus* (showing the distinctive black lines on either side of the midrib). Photos of *Vaccinium* and *Hypericum*: Caroline.

Text and photos by David Barden, except where by Karen Wilkinson and Caroline O'Rourke (as noted).

This version replaces that first released on 28 October 2017, which contained a few errors.