How did it all start?
When I moved to South Wales in 2011, I immediately started recording plants on Llantrisant Common, a botanically-rich site next to where I lived. Over the years, the grass grew in breadth and detail, and I decided that I should ‘do something’ with it, beyond simply uploading the records to the BSBI database.
So I went into it together – a site flora! That summarised what I’d found. But I set myself a big challenge, because I was keen to document what I’d found in the form of a site flora – but could something that was interesting to a wide audience while still being botanically thorough?

Here’s my experience!

What I found
The result of this effort has been:
• I’ve made nearly 11,800 records, 6% at c10 m resolution.
• I’ve recorded 400 taxa, including 376 that hadn’t been previously recorded on the site.
• I’ve mapped the distributions of ‘special’ plants known to be present, and found many new populations of them.
• I’ve uploaded the records to the BSBI database.
• I’ve surveyed over 40 quadrats.
• I found some unexpected rarities too:
  ■ Hieracium adelphicum
  ■ Palustre
  ■ Cirsium acaule
  ■ Molinia caerulea
  ■ Sibthorpia
  ■ Epilobium
  ■ Carex
  ■ Taraxacum
  ■ Lemna minor

About the site
Llantrisant Common and Patches SSSI covers about 120 hectares immediately north of Llantrisant, about 8km north-west of Cardiff, in v.c. 41 (Glamorgan). The flora of Llantrisant Common is remarkably rich, thanks to its undulating landscape, long history of livestock grazing, and mixture of ‘Wolds’ habitats, including:
• Hieracium canescens and marsh: Flora
• Acid-neutral digger granular
• Wild heaths
• Streams and ditches
• Scrub and woodland

My day job is as a writer/editor, and I have access to high-quality software, so I decided to publish the book. This also means we were able to incorporate the best aspects of other floras I’d seen, so I included:
• Background information on landscape, habitats, climate, etc.
• Individual habitat studies
• Aerial photos, detailed site maps and historical notes.
• Detailed plant accounts, including:
  - Distribution maps (1000 x 900)
  - Iso-area
  - Frequency and spread
  - Details of variants
  - Herbaceous populations and occurrences
  - Deciduous: named colour photos
  - Identification tips for selected species

An example of the typical more species-rich habitats on Llantrisant Common. With thanks and strong panning down through to Helicaea marginata © David Barden.

My approach to writing...
I aimed to keep the writing approachable, with a minimum of botanical jargon, and explanations of unfamiliar terms. I was slightly more conversational in the captions, as I reclined the reader would be more likely to get read on a ‘Wolds’ through by non-botanists.

How did I do it?
Writing a ‘site flora’ with broad appeal: An experience from Glamorgan

David Barden
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From 2011 to 2020, I intensively recorded the flora of a ‘rhum pasture’ SSSI close to where I live in South Wales. I was keen to document what I’d found in the form of a ‘site flora’ – but could something that was interesting to a wide audience while still being botanically thorough?

Here’s my experience!

How did I do it?

How did I do it?

Printing, pricing, promotion

I decided on a consistent colour theme and fonts with one of the many sites. I also raised the price at £12.50 to make it value-for-money for readers with a paying interest in plants, but in retrospect I could probably have gone £1–2 higher without affecting sales too much.

I launched the book in November 2020, with promotion through Facebook, the local BSBI group and other local listings. On hearing this, I wrote a series of articles, invited book reviews, conference presentation talks, and word-of-mouth.

Sales feedback
In two years, I’ve shifted 147 copies:
• 124 have been sold (72% since, 27% through shops)
• 23 have been gifted, donated or otherwise given away.

Sales feedback

Supporting BSBI objectives?
In the late stages of writing the book, I saw Lynne Farrell’s summary of the three BSBI objectives (BSBI News, September 2020, p.4).

Although I didn’t write my book with these objectives in mind, it strikes me that, if carefully constructed, site floras could help to achieve objectives 2 and 3, and perhaps also objective 2.

BSBI objective Can site floras help with...
1. Building a more diverse community of botanists
   • Appealing to those interested in the plants that can be found here, to the flora
   • Being relatively affordable, because of their inherently limited scope!

2. Providing high-quality, impartial data
   • Providing comprehensive species coverage, and detail on abundance and distribution at a fine scale

3. Disseminating information to drive a passion for plants
   • Providing identification tips while avoiding too many botanical terms
   • Demonstrating enthusiasm for the plants, and using plenty of colour photos

What do you think? What site/regional floras are there in your area that fulfill these roles? Do we need more of them?

What I learned
For anyone thinking of writing a site flora, here are a few things I’ve learnt from the process:

1. Decide on a cut-off date for recording and stick to it, because the flora of a site is constantly changing.
   - In 2 years since I finished surveying in August 2020, I’ve found 5 additional taxa, both newly arrived and overwintered.
   - Maps can be a nuisance for small sites – OS maps may not show the detail you want, and you need to pay a licence fee if you reproduce them with more details, as I did. But Google’s aerial images are free!

2. Be prepared to have your knowledge tested to its limits – in the final proof, a colleague pointed out that my photo of Lenorm’s grass was not in fact the ‘flat’ form of Lenorm’s grs, which I’d never heard of – it’s an eastern form!

3. Special handling needs – self-publishing was great, because I was in complete control, and I could do exactly as I liked. I’d originally wanted to keep the book to 160 pages, but as I had it out, I realised I was running out of space, but I could do it exactly as I liked.

4. Special handling needs – ‘rhôs pasture’ SSSI close to where I live in South Wales.

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I also broadened my research to include:
• Studying aerial material
• Taking to local residents
• Finding old photos and maps

How do I feel about the project in retrospect?

So how do I feel about the project in retrospect?

Because the book included such a lot of detail and I did it to somewhat exciting standards, it’s taken a fairly ridiculous amount of time to research, write and type.

But... self-publishing was great, because I was in complete control, and I could do exactly as I liked. I’d originally wanted to keep the book to 160 pages, but as I had it out, I realised I was running out of space, but I could do it exactly as I liked.

And... it’s been great promotion for plants/wildlife in the local area, which has helped the commoner attract funding for management, and has become a point of reference for future studies.

Finally, it’s helped me get better at my plants too – except I still can’t get the size right...