

Rediscovery of *Astragalus glycyphyllos* Wild Liquorice at Thornyhive Bay, Kincardineshire

David Elston, for Scottish Botanists' Conference 2024

Background

The main site for *Astragalus glycyphyllos* Wild Liquorice in Kincardineshire is at St Cyrus, where it grows on steeply sloping sea cliffs and in the cutting of a disused railway line. Whilst preparing a Rare Plant Register for Kincardineshire I noticed some pre-1900 records from Thornyhive Bay, south of Stonehaven. Further investigations showed it was discovered there by Dr David Skene who died in 1770. Dr Skene was the first person to leave any botanical records from the Aberdeen area, and his record of *A. glycyphyllos* from Thornyhive Bay was the first for the species in Scotland.



Thornyhive Bay, showing the area where *A. glycyphyllos* was rediscovered.

Initial failure

Having made my way rather uncomfortably along the cliff top, then through brambles and nettles to the shore, I scanned the cliffs all round using binoculars, noting *Ervilia sylvatica* Wood Vetch at the south end of the bay but no sign of *A. glycyphyllos*. Although later in the year the plants will be large and sprawling, hence visible from afar, at this early stage of the season it was possible the plants were still small and with the forecast rain holding off I decided not to give up just yet.



Ultimate success

From the shore, the most likely prospect appeared to be in the area of some projecting bluffs where the vegetation was less dense. I made my way cautiously up the steep grassland to the most accessible of these bluffs, enthusiasm maintained by plants of interest such as *Rumex sanguineus* Wood Dock and *Origanum vulgare* Wild Marjoram.

Once in the right place, it didn't take long to find the first *A. glycyphyllos*, and some exploration revealed three more. The above ground shoots were all still quite small and only discernable from within 10 metres. I had lunch by one of these, heels wedged into the soil for security, as drizzle began to fall.

A return visit would be beneficial later in the season would be beneficial to get a more accurate estimate of population size.