

Fletcher Moss Gardens

28th March 1998

Three weeks before the walk, much of our usual route was under water. After torrential rain, the level of the Mersey rose so high that the Environment Agency ordered the sluice gates near to Millgate Lane to be opened and flood water poured across the fields and into Stenner Woods and Fletcher Moss Park. By the end of March most of this water had drained away but it was still very wet and muddy everywhere so the leader decided to go a different way and keep to the higher ground.

Our starting point, as usual, was the Parsonage Gardens and twelve members enjoyed the early display of *Anemone blanda*, *Eurphorbia characias*, *Helleborus corsicus*, Pieris Forest Flame and fragrant *Viburnum x burkwoodii*. An elder growing in the middle of a weeping beech was an unusual sight. In Fletcher Moss Gardens *Skimmia japonica* was in flower and *Aucuba japonica* was in fruit while the rock garden was bright with daffodils, tulips, and smaller bulbous plants. Three species of butterfly, brimstone, comma, and peacock, had been tempted out by the warm sunshine.

At the edge of Stenner Woods, a bright splash of colour was made by opposite-leaved golden saxifrage. We heard the leader's first chiff-chaff of the year, and she and another member spent some time watching a tree-creeper, which obviously had a nest in the stump of a rotten tree. We were delighted to see and hear a skylark over Millgate Fields, and, in and around these fields, we recorded butterbur, coltsfoot, creeping cinquefoil, lesser celandine, red deadnettle, and ivy-leaved and germander speedwells.

Stoneclough and Prestolee

11th April 1998

In spite of very threatening weather six people attended in addition to the leaders; the anticipated rain never appeared. Starting from Kearsley station, we took the path Northward parallel to the railway line. Having descended the steep muddy slope toward Farnworth we skirted the SSSI at Nob End and returned via Prestolee.

A wide variety of birds were seen or heard, including nesting swans, great-, blue-, coal-, and longtail-tits and a pair of Jays. Notable plants included woodland loosestrife and marsh hawkbeard near Stoneclough, black spleenwort and harts tongue fern on the masonry of the Bolton & Bury canal and swinecress at the side of the A667, as well as 15 species of *Rubus*. The liverwort *Priessia quadrata*, a strict calcicole and therefore rare in Lancashire, was seen at Nob End. Bluebells and sweet cicely were just coming into bloom. We saw one solitary peacock butterfly.

Bridgewater Canal, Broadheath

25th April 1998

On a chilly but sunny day five members walked along the canal to Dunham then returned along the new Transpennine European Cycle Track, formerly part of the railway line to Lymm and Warrington. From Seamons Moss Bridge, the route was through an old cobbled lane eventually getting to John Leigh Park. The last lap was through the old Linotype estate back to the canal.

Two more clumps of royal fern were found on the canal banks and some *Angelica archangelica*. (Graeme Kay the Cheshire Recorder was interested to note that the angelica had spread this far. It is said to have originated in the Manchester Ship Canal near Trafford Bridge). Stitchwort, *Stellaria holostea*, seems to survive the intensive agricultural conditions and a large patch was found. *Viola arvensis*, the field pansy, also seems to be a survivor, occurring in a field of rape but *Viola riviniana*, the common violet is very scarce in the hedgerows so we were pleased to find one plant on the cycle way. Spring beauty, *Claytonia perfoliata*, a relative of pink purslane, was scattered on walls and at tree bases near to the park. It is an introduced species, a weed of cultivation, and it is supposed to be good with to eat. In the middle of the park is a handsome fern leaved beech and earlier in the year, there were quite a few fungi around.

Alkrington Woods**9th May 1998**

On a beautiful day, for a change for this ramble, 4 members waited nearly half an hour for the 59 bus to sail past with no members on it. Never mind because we eventually set off on a very enjoyable walk around the two fishing lodges at Rhodes where we saw Grebes nesting, Canada Geese with their 3 large yellow youngsters and Mallard with 9 tiny babies not more than two days old. For the first two days, the female mallards preen the babies with oil to waterproof them before letting them into the water. We also saw a Heron standing on one of the nesting platforms with 5 large white geese. These geese were very aggressive towards us two days earlier when we encountered them on the grassy picnic area and we had to fend them off with a walking stick. The trees and bushes were very attractive as their fresh leaves were opening, and the Ornamental Whitebeam was covered in flower. We saw Ladies Smock in the boggy area beside the lodges, and Sweet Vernal Grass, Bistort, Cow Parsley, Butterbur, Red Campion, Bluebells, Garlic Mustard, Good Friday Grass and Comfrey along the edges of the River Irk, which we walked along the left hand side. A little way on we came to some benches under the trees on the riverside, stopped for our lunch, and saw a Jay.

We continued on to a little nature reserve created by Middleton Council with good paths and boardwalks across the wet areas where we saw Marsh Marigolds, Orange Tip Butterflies, Willow Warblers at very close quarters, Great Tits and Robins - the birdsong was deafening. Leaving the reserve we crossed Lever Bridge and looked up the grassy hill in front of us at the impressive sight of Alkrington Hall. It originally belonged to the Lever family and was rebuilt in 1735 on the site of the first hall built in 1627. In 1942, Middleton Council bought it at auction for £2,900, which was a bargain because when it was previously sold in 1845 to the Lees brothers of Oldham, it commanded a price of £57,550.

In 1771, the Lever family founded a museum in the Hall and opened it to the public but it became so popular that admittance had to be refused after 2 p.m. Two years later a notice was published that they were tired of the insolence of the common people and were refusing admittance to the lower classes, except when they came with a ticket from a gentleman or lady of their acquaintance! The Lever's also had a zoo there. Eventually, because of the high costs of maintenance, the zoo was disbanded and the museum contents were removed to Leicester House in London.

After crossing the bridge, we continued along the opposite side of the river towards Middleton, passing McBride's chemical factory, which is responsible for regular spillages into the River Irk, for which they regularly are fined. Kitchen Wood on our right was very pretty with drifts of bluebells, a fine Dryad's Saddle fungus, and tiny Coral fungus. We turned right, climbed a steep path along the top of the wood, and found the Wood Millet grass (*Milium Effusum*) which Audrey Franks pointed out to us many years ago. We found Pink Purslane, Pignut, Lesser Celandine, and Comfrey.

Birds seen in the vicinity were Long-Tailed Tits, Swifts, Wood Pigeon, Jackdaw, and Greenfinch. Climbing out of this wood, we came to another fishing lodge. Then past some old cottages that have been ruined by pebble dashing over the original brickwork. There was an ice-cream factory and shop in some old farm buildings, which made a refreshing break, but now renovated into two expensive houses. Passing the Hall and a Bird Sanctuary, we turned left into Alkrington Woods, which were also very pleasant. In 1987, this area was declared to be of great importance because of its interesting bird life and for the wide range of flora and fauna. We saw many grey squirrels, Chiffchaff were calling, and Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell Butterflies were seen. We descended out of the wood to Belstead Brook and along to another large fishing lodge, then walked along the river back towards Rhodes Lodges. As the day was so nice we extended the walk along the Irk in the Manchester direction and Audrey Locksley was delighted to find Sphagnum Moss on a bank, the only other flower found was Common Mouse-ear. On a higher bank was a large display of wood horsetail. We retraced our steps and crossed the river to Swan Lodge and through a meadow where Audrey found the leaves of Common Spotted Orchid. Across the grassy lawns and picnic area to the carpark.

Etherow Country Park

6th June 1998

Only one person came to join me for the walk on this occasion. The yellow irises were in full bloom as well as many other marsh plants such as pink purslane, bistort, giant horsetails and bog stitchwort with dames violet near the water. In the woods were greater woodrush, wild strawberries, ramsons, germander and wood speedwells, yellow pimpernel, three-veined sandwort, *Moehringia trinerva*, and thyme-leaved sandwort. Guelder rose and *Rosa rubiginosa* were in flower. The bird cherry trees were covered with webs full of the caterpillars, which hang on threads. Some of the trees had been almost stripped bare by this infestation.

The swan as usual was sitting on her nest at the end of Keg pool but the aggressive male was not in evidence this year. Many Canada geese had families of delightful goslings. Some appeared to be running a crèche system as one or two pairs of adults guarded a great many youngsters sitting in a group on the grass.

Dave Earl, my companion, identified *Rubus porphyrocaulis* and many other blackberries. He was pleased to find an, as yet, officially unnamed blackberry at both the Cheshire and Derbyshire sides of the River Etherow. He hopes that it may be named after Bailey, a Manchester naturalist.

Ainsdale

13th June 1998

This joint meeting with Liverpool Botanic Society started very wet. Five members and a visitor from Manchester joined eleven others. Starting with asparagus, the dune flora is so different to ours that we were kept busy looking right and left at grasses, sedges, and flowers. Deep purple dune pansies, wine coloured marsh cinquefoil, *Potentilla palustris*, and yellow kidney vetch and bulbous buttercups brightened up the overcast day. We were shown the differences between hybrid willows, inspected the *Orchis incarnata* and the highlight of the day yellow bird's nest, *Monotropa hypopitys*, a saprophyte.

The Middlewood Way

19th June 1998

On a day of alternating sun and rain, five of us set off from outside the Boar's Head at Higher Poynton, and three of us completed the course.

There was a good variety of plants, blackberry and elder flowers, goosegrass, wild rose, everlasting sweet pea (garden escape), herb Bennett, creeping buttercup, tufted forget-me-not, woody nightshade, bush vetch, maretail, red clover, willow herbs, stinging nettle, honeysuckle, foxglove, ragged robin, pink water speedwell, herb Robert, hedge woundwort, cow parsley, lesser stitchwort, lady's mantle, common sorrel, yellow vetchling, tormentil, skullcap, plantain, black medick, water mint, common spotted orchid, marsh bedstraw and greater bird's foot trefoil.

Also seen were a few swallows, willow warbler, and chiffchaff. On our return along the canal bank were a few coots, and many Canada geese and mallards, all with young.

River Bollin, Hale

4th July 1998

Ten members turned up for this walk after the wettest June for many years. Though very cloudy, the day was dry overhead but the footpaths were extremely muddy. The first plant to be inspected, at the corner of the path to the Bollin with Bankhall Lane was *Petasites fragrans*, fragrant butterbur or winter heliotrope, which flowers early in the year. The patch seems to be getting bigger and was first recorded by Audrey Franks in

The woodland by the river is delightful, even more so on a hot sunny day. The main speedwell is the hairy wood speedwell, *Veronica Montana*, so we compared all details with more familiar ones. Several members were fortunate to see kingfishers flash by twice. A footbridge over the river leads to a field full of high grass with several blue patches of field geranium, *Geranium pratense*, possibly sown there. A swooping bird alighted on the top twig of a tree and was identified as a spotted woodpecker.

Passing by the golf course Barrow Lane is reached and here was a stand of giant hogweed under which the party posed for their photograph. A giant sample, 120 cm. high, of creeping soft grass *Holcus mollis* was also

found along with false oat grass and reed canary grass. Rossmill Lane leads into another section of the Bollin Valley; the notice board indicated that sanicle was there but we did not find any. A young tree thought to be a walnut had been planted, but, further round, an old black poplar had fallen across a ditch from the golf course and over the path. The main trunk had been sawn off perhaps twenty years ago judging by the five sturdy branches now reaching for the sky. Samples of this tree were taken in February for propagation as part of a conservation study by Cheshire Wildlife Trust.

The path and lane were retraced and a path through the woods lead up to a steep cobbled lane. Yellow pimpernel was found and several clumps of *Tellima grandiflora*, fringe cups, a garden escape are well established. The old paths from here, back to Rappax Road are fenced off between gardens but a good find was three-veined sandwort.

Glow-worm Gala, Poynton Coppice

7th July 1998

Ten members and guests gathered in the dusk and were cautioned by our guide from Wilmslow Guild not to expect to see any glow-worms until 10.30. In the event, the first distinctive greenish-white glow was spotted before dark and we were able to look at the small insect with a torch. It is the female, which glows in order to attract her mate.

After a short walk, we saw quite a few more along the damp grassy verges of the Middlewood Way, and so were able to leave feeling that we had accomplished our objective. Our guide had kindly given us an excellent description of the glow-worm life cycle and habits. **Peter White**

Stamford Park and King George V Pool, Altrincham

18th July 1998

The weather forecast was not good but our Chairman, Owen McCann, for whom this was a nostalgic walk, and the leader set off through the park. This park is little altered from the plan shown in People's Parks by Hazel Conway. On its centenary in 1884, a commemorative stone and some animal sculptures were provided by Marks & Spencers. Unusual for these days, the two pools are still in existence. One was provided originally for bathing but now used only by ducks, geese, and a swan. The park is also a haven for birds like the thrush, which seem to be scarce elsewhere.

A path by the former British gas site leads to the public golf course and Timperley Brook, which drains into the large King George V Pool, mainly used for fishing. An enormous carp twice jumped up from the water for our benefit. A cobbled path leads through a grove of trees to The Old Hall Restaurant and at the back of this is an ancient moated site, a good place for water-loving plants. Retracing our route, the golf course was skirted round to check a blue flowered plant previously found in a hedge in a field leading to Green Lane. This was *Cicerbita macrophylla*, Blue Lettuce with sticky hairy stems. Back near to the gas site, behind some terraced houses a good patch of yellow turned out to be perforated St. John's Wort as well as ragwort. In recording for this Cheshire 10 Km. square, a greater variety of plants have been found in the built-up section of Altrincham. Bowdon and Hale compared with the rural agricultural areas.



Unexplored corners of Prestwich

25th July 1998

The five naturalists who turned up for this walk were not at first aware that it was to be an assault course. A broken stile meant climbing over railings into Philips Park and then rustling through very long grass. It was good to see that some attempt is being made to restore the gardens in Philips Park but beyond the grounds an old cobbled lane is likely to alter as houses are now being built on the adjacent land.

At the start of a footpath, the builders were quite surprised to see walkers entering the overgrown path, which eventually vanished into dense bracken along the hillside. A welcome footbridge and a very obvious stile at the bottom onto the disused railway restored everyone's confidence in the leader.

There was a great abundance of all the common wild flowers along the Irwell valley, including the orchids, and the whole area is attracting birds and butterflies. We did not see any signs of the giant hogweed but as it is biennial, there is time yet for it to recover from the previous year's weedkilling.

Prestwich Clough however is losing many plants because of dense shade, but bright pink *Lychnis*, a garden escape, is spreading on one of the sunnier banks.

Dainwell Woods, Carrington

15th August 1998

Our first surprise of the day had nothing to do with wildlife, at least not in the accepted sense. Our meeting spot on Isherwood Road was heaving with vans, bikes, dogs, and all the accompanying debris of the travelling community. It seemed prudent to park elsewhere. Stan Lewis at Swiss Cottage Farm soon accommodated us in his barnyard, telling us that he had had humming bird hawk moths in his garden, though we were not lucky enough to see them.

The new training ground for Manchester United is rapidly taking place, sadly sectioning off a good third of the moss behind high security fencing. However, we found enough to keep us busy along the old pathways with wood sage, lady fern and gorse remnants of the relict mossland. The ditches still held floating sweet grass, soft rush, and amphibious bistort.

At midday, perching on some abandoned straw bales in a field gave a pleasant rural feel to our lunchbreak. The sunshine brought out the butterflies, the whites most numerous, like blossoms on the cereal crops. Ten species were recorded including small copper and wall butterfly. Dragonflies included Migrant Hawker and Black darter, two species becoming more common in the area.

Though we are losing part of the moss to developers, North West Water have plans afoot to turn the nearby defunct Altrincham Sewage Works into a wildlife park. Maybe the future is brighter than we thought.

Styal Woods from Wilmslow

12th September 1998

There can be little more to say about this often-repeated walk. At this time of the year, we found that many of the flowers were over. We saw mainly Himalayan balsam flowering in profusion, with some meadowsweet. There were good crops of blackberries.

We were, of course, too early for the autumn colours of next month.

What was (mercifully) unusual about the walk was the atrocious weather. We had several torrents of rain, interspersed with bright sunshine, as well as a noisy thunderstorm - as we made our way through the wet grass, puddles, and mud.

When it came to lunchtime the three members of the party perched on a low wall under trees, in some comfort.

Nearby was a large vehicle marked "Poynton Commodores —Drum and Bugle Corps", It appeared that the large number of people present (adults and children) were having a final rehearsal before playing in a

competition at Scunthorpe the following day. All this provided us with free interest and entertainment before we splashed our way home, a little earlier than usual.

Fletcher Moss Gardens

26th September 1998

Seven members started out and the day proved fine, with the sunshine coming through as we walked along. In the eastern corner of Parsonage Gardens is a fine mulberry tree, and there were just enough of the large black fruits for each of us to try one. Looking around the rock gardens a notable record was New Zealand Willowherb (a very small and prostrate plant) found on some of the rocks bordering the steps.

After lunch we strolled along the Mersey bank to Northenden, coming across some excellent groups of Autumn Crocus and identifying the two types: *Crocus nudiflora* and *Crocus speciosa*. We also spied some people canoeing near the weir. On the way back along Ford Lane, some dried up fruits on stems turned out to be *Mimulus*.

Several members are becoming keen on identifying mosses. Small specimens were collected for later positive identification.

Delamere Forest

4th October 1998

Nine members and one guest ambled along the forest paths, exploring the various habitats. So far, this has not been a good season for fungi. We found about 20 different species the noteworthy ones being: - Geranium scented Russula, *Lycoperdon pellatum*, *Boletus badeus*, red cracking bolete, *Stropharia aeruginosa* and ergot.

We passed a fine hornbeam near the visitor centre and, close by, was a magnificent caterpillar of the Pale Tussock Moth. The sun brought out a number of dragonflies and while Alan was identifying them, one obligingly came and settled to rest on the field guide he was using! It was a Red Darter.

As we strolled back, we came across some stinkhorn fungus and a group of the "eggs" from which they grow. The complete fruiting body, complete with spores, simply grows larger and longer when it is ready. Two members took an egg away hopefully to bring to fruition at home.

