

## **Chorlton Water Park**

**2<sup>nd</sup> January 1999**

The five people who turned up were well rewarded by sunshine and a mild day. Winter scenery has a special charm and the water's edge was enhanced by the 'feathers' of the reeds.

Sale Water Park wardens made us very welcome by allowing us to have lunch in the schoolroom where Margaret McCormick enthusiastically discussed the merits of buying a computer to aid her work on the reserve, especially at Kenworthy Fields where her special project on fungi is sited.

We noticed that some oak trees still clung to their brown, crisped leaves, but spring seemed a long way off, despite the odd flower or two from last year.

## **Fletcher Moss**

**27<sup>th</sup> March 1999**

Seven members and one guest were favoured by very warm and sunny conditions, the spring being mild so far this year. This was a day of some queries, walking the usual route around the Parsonage Gardens, through the wild flower meadow and along the Mersey banks. We found specimens, which were thought to be Swinecress and wood avens. Some fungi were spotted but not identified.

## **Prestwich**

**10<sup>th</sup> April 1999**

There were 11 participants including an encouraging number of young visitors. We started in very poor weather from the Metro Station and proceeded by the road to the South of the Hospital to Mere Clough. Large quantities of Thale Cress were observed in the streets of Prestwich, and grey squirrels in the hospital grounds.

In the Clough we saw bluebells just coming into flower, Dogs mercury, Celandines, Wood Anemones and Marsh Marigolds. There were extensive patches of Garlic, just coming into bud, and several flowering cherries, probably planted. In the pond at Clifton there were large numbers of tadpoles.

In much better weather, we followed the Irwell for some distance, and returned to Prestwich by the Clough to the South of Mere Clough. Birds heard or seen during the outing included coal tits and long tail tits, chiffchaff, robin, wren, and jay.

## **Flixton Meadows and Ship Canal**

**24<sup>th</sup> April 1999**

Six members met at Flixton Pool for an interesting spring walk. We took a path across the meadows, along by the railway line, the Ship canal and a built-up area, before rejoining the way back across the meadows, where later in the year orchids can be found. Today an exciting find was *Ajuga reptans* (Bugle). This is only the second record in the hectad ( SJ 79), the other being in Botany Bay Wood, now alas, rather inaccessible. Among many other harbingers of spring were *Viola riviniana* (Common Dog-violet), *Luzula campestris* (Good Friday Grass or Field Woodrush), *Cardamine pratensis* (Lady's Smock) and the hybrid Bluebell.

Towards the end of the walk we investigated the hill composed of ash from the former power station. Here we found growing *Poa angustifolia* (Narrow-leaved Meadow Grass) later confirmed by John Edmunsden of the Liverpool Museum. This is not often recorded in our area and has probably been introduced in a seed mix, but it was obviously well established. It is similar to *Poa pratensis* (Common Meadow Grass) but has much narrower leaves.

During the walk we also saw the following birds and butterflies: swan, pheasant, skylark, willow warbler, chiffchaff, reed bunting, orange tip, peacock, tortoiseshell and speckled wood. It is amazing what is surviving so close to our huge urban sprawl. Let us hope these precious open spaces will never be encroached upon.

## Arley Hall Gardens

15<sup>th</sup> May 1999

Fourteen members and a visitor had a warm sunny day for this trip, which was subsidised by the Field Club - an alternative to subsidising a coach trip. First we walked round the wooded gardens, admiring the shrubs and flowers. An old lady was admiring some plants at the far end and as we passed she asked us had we been before. After a short conversation we realised she was the Dowager Duchess out for her morning stroll. I had cycled to the gatehouse in my teens with messages for Miss Pennington, a friend of my aunt. She sewed for the family, and Lady Ashbrook not only remembered her, but remembered her mother as well.

Some picnicked at the tables near the house and others had lunch in the restaurant and then we made our way round the formal gardens. The large herbaceous border had a magnificent array of blue ceanothus on the brick-red wall, purple alliums, and lilac violas at the front. Margaret Brown took the opportunity to sketch the hall and gate from the garden, the result you see here. Some of the party walked around the lane outside the grounds to Arley Green and the woods.

This day out was very enjoyable and thanks go to those members who kindly offered lifts.

## Hardcastle Crag, Hebden Bridge

22<sup>nd</sup> May 1999

It was a dry day on setting out from the carpark at Hardcastle Crag, six members attending. The adjacent wall had a light dusting of ferns including Brittle Bladder Fern, Common Spleenwort, and Lady Fern. Showers then developed but not enough to spoil our enjoyment of the carpets of bluebell, greater stitchwort and pink purslane separated on the woodland floor by areas of Greater Woodrush (*Luauula sylvatica*). Two young squirrels were seen almost flying between branches as we walked by the streamside and a dipper was feeding a well-grown noisy chick on a nearby rock.

After lunching at Gibsons Mill in sunshine we followed the path upstream to find *Cardamine Amara*, opposite leaved golden saxifrage (now finished flowering), wood horsetail and a single perfect flower of Marsh Violet (*Viola Palustris*). Grey Wagtails and more Dippers were spotted on the rocks. In the woods members found wood millet (*Milium Effusum*), remote sedge (*Carex Remota*), hairy woodrush (*Luzula pilosa*), and *Melica Uniflora*. Several ant nests were seen near to the path which are said to be the Northern Hairy Wood Ant; there was much activity here, and we could not help feeling a little guilty about stepping on some of the members of this thriving community. Three sturdy wooden bridges gave views over the stream and then it was uphill to the forest road and back to our starting point.

## Lymm Dam and Slitten Gorge

5<sup>th</sup> June 1999

Slitten Gorge is a little bit of history that thankfully has remained undisturbed by later developments in other parts of this pretty Cheshire village. Avoiding the centre where a modern supermarket incongruously faces the ancient village stocks, we take the road that dives under the canal and out of the village to the north. A gap in the wall on the right leads one down steep stone steps into a deep ravine of sandstone rock, whose sheltered sides provide protection for ferns, lichens and flowering plants, as well as birds like kingfisher and heron, which fish the stream that runs through this quiet haven.

Slitten Gorge derives its name from the slitting mill that was there in the 19th century. This utilised waterpower from the stream to cut sheet metal into strips in the production of nails. A wooden footbridge takes you across the stream where the remains of this past industry can still be seen.

An interesting plant we found there was *Tellima grandiflora* or Fringe cups for its more descriptive name, a plant of North American origin.

We were soon heading back to the village and along the path through the Dingle, a wooded valley, with below on our left the same stream, but now in full summer sunshine and edged with a host of colourful waterside flowers and shrubs backed by a row of picturesque cottages. Beeches towered above us on steep sloping banks, their roots exposed like grotesque tentacles that arched and spread towards the path.

At the far end, we crossed the A56 and were now at the dam itself. Built by Lord Leverhulme with a view to creating an industrial town, he was unsuccessful, due to local opposition and took his ideas elsewhere, to Port Sunlight I believe.

We walked round the dam and along the 'bongs' at the far end. I can't find the origin of that name! We picnicked on the other side with a fine view of a family of great-crested grebes, father busy fishing and feeding the three chicks, whilst they rode in style on mother grebes back.

The weather was especially kind, and all eight of us had an enjoyable day in a picture postcard setting. It's a pity though, about the supermarket!

### **Glow-worm Gala**

**7<sup>th</sup> July 1999**

Six members and one guest met at 10.45 at the Poynton Coppice car park. The night was warm and we had to wait around chatting till it was dark enough. The leader answered all sorts of questions about the glow-worm habits, the most surprising being that they feed off snails! There are not as many of these beetle larvae, their habitat requirements being very specific. The vegetation along the canal is getting overgrown but in the grassland higher up a field path we saw about eight green glows. A very exciting night out.

### **The Weaver Navigation**

**17<sup>th</sup> July 1999**

The great blue metal structure of Hartford bridge looms across the Weaver, as it winds its way under the A556 towards Northwich, indeed a landmark not easy to miss. So 'unmissable' in fact, that other aspects of the area can be overlooked, like it is the 'in' place to be on a Saturday if you happen to be into competitive angling. That day I think everyone who owned a fishing rod turned up at the very spot we had chosen to meet. Needless to say, we missed Christine and Roger somehow in the chaos of the car-parking, and so there were four.

From the East bank we made our way south-west towards Vale Royal locks along a pretty waterside track edged with flowering meadows and riverside habitats thronging with plant, bird and insect life of varying sorts. Happily, the anglers were all on the far bank, so it was a peaceful stroll in pleasant summer sunshine.

Soon, under the massive structure of the railway viaduct that carries the main Southbound trains via Crewe to London, we paused to admire the skill of the Victorian railway pioneers. A far cry from the ugly blue monster on the A556.

Coot, moorhen, grebe and swans all with their young. Heron, grey and pied wagtail and countless damsel and dragonflies happily share this quiet backwater. Although it was too late in the year to see it, the hairy dragonfly (*Brachytron pratense*) breeds in the old portion of the Weaver that runs alongside the navigation behind Vale Royal locks. The Gatekeeper butterfly has a stronghold here now, and was the most abundant of the many others we saw.

There is so much going on in this quiet wooded valley, one could spend a very long summer day exploring its delights. However, sadly, age will out, so, knees protesting, we reluctantly turned northwards after our late picnic lunch and wandered back to Vale Royal locks and return by the western bank. The anglers were still there, quietly hidden somewhere in the trees below us, only the crowded car-park later betraying their presence.

It had been a pleasant walk, no rarities to record, but a memory, of crossing over the locks where we spotted a yellow flower growing from the timber lock-gate, too far away to identify. The lock-keeper saw us peering through binoculars and came over. We explained, and he had a look too. "Oh, it's just wild flower" he said and promptly lost interest and left us. We found a closer observation spot; it was a trifold-bur-marigold. Not a rarity, but still a wild flower, and we were grateful he had not called it just a weed.

### **Blackley Woods**

**31<sup>st</sup> July 1999**

This was probably the hottest day of the year and deterred several members from attending. The leaders walked to the meeting place but caught a bus home.

## Dunham Woodhouse/Warburton

**14<sup>th</sup> August 1999**

When this walk was pioneered one long footpath was totally overgrown but the council responded quickly and cleared it. Unfortunately the leader had family problems and so the walk was kindly led by Peter and Diana White. Five members set out in the sunshine and it was reported that they enjoyed the walk and suggested that it be repeated, though without the thunderstorm and hailstones which made a moist ending.

In the hedge along the field path is an alder buckthorn already in fruit. Though they were common in Cheshire, this is the first one I have come across. One section, an old tip fully regenerated with wild flowers including orchids was the lunch stop. Sad to relate, that when I passed by two weeks ago (November) a lot more tipping was taking place. However, another highlight, a large clump of harebells in a road hedgerow will still be there I hope, and on the old railway, now part of the Millennium Cycle Track.

## Haigh Hall, Wigan

**28<sup>th</sup> August 1999**

Nine members and two children walked through the woods to Haigh Hall. A few common flowers lingered on but the drought has caused a premature autumn scene. Crisped leaves were falling from the trees already and there is unlikely to be a colourful autumn.

The route followed the River Douglas out of Wigan and then we walked back along the Lancaster canal in pleasant sunshine.

## Guide Bridge

**4<sup>th</sup> September 1999**

The leader was accompanied by Maurice Lees, Margaret McCormick, & John Lowell at our starting point Guide Bridge station. Here a leafy hawkweed with prominent teeth was examined. The plants were similar to those seen on the banks of the River Tame during the Reddish Vale Wild Flower Society meeting of 1996 and may possibly be the same as the Didsbury hawkweed Richard Buxton referred to as *Hieracium tridentatum* in his flora of 1849.

At the entrance to the goods yard *Rubus cardiophyllus* Lef. & P.J. Mueller was found. This southern species has been found on several occasions about railway lines to the east of Manchester. Other noteworthy species observed included Squirrel-tail fescue *Vulpia bromoides* and the increasingly abundant Canadian fleabane *Conyza canadensis*.

After crossing the old footbridge over the railway system we reached the Ashton Canal. We were impressed with the abundance of wildflowers in such an urban setting. Plants of the canal margin included skullcap *Scutellaria galericulata*, gypsywort *Lycopus europaeus*, yellow loosestrife *Lysimachia vulgaris*, marsh woundwort *Stachys palustris*, wild angelica *Angelica vulgaris*, water forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides*, tripartite bur-marigold *Bidens tripartita*, remote sedge *Carex remota*, great water dock *Rumex hydrolapathum*, sharp dock *Rumex conglomeratus*, water mint *Mentha aquatica*, branched bur-reed *Sparganium erectum* and marsh yellow-cress *Rorippa palustris*. A hybrid mint was also found and thought to be *Mentha x verticillata*. Aquatic species of the canal included arrowhead *Sagittaria sagittifolia*, floating water plantain, *Luronium natans*, broad-leaved pondweed *Potamogeton natans*, Nuttall's waterweed *Elodea nuttallii*, and unbranched bur-reed *Sparganium emersum*. Along the towpath were plants of Slender Rush *Juncus tenuis*, Flax *Linum usitatissimum*, and *Hieracium vagum*. Plants of the railway wall included both common and pale toadflax *Linaria vulgaris* and *L. repens* and it is therefore possible that hybrid plants might occur in this area.

The most significant botanical find along the Ashton Canal was the discovery of a moss that is very rare in VC59 *Octodicerias fontanum* growing in relative abundance along the water mark on the canal towpath stones. *Octodicerias* was reported to occur in an overflow channel of the Ashton Canal by J.C. Wilson in 1912. It seems probable that a population of *Octodicerias* has been present along the canal for a considerable period of

time and it is possible that further populations of *Octodicerias* may await discovery along the Manchester canal systems.

Close to bridge 28 the canal runs adjacent to the banks of the R. Tame. Here a mystery bramble (no longer in flower) showed some similarities to the undescribed early flowering 'Alderley Edge Bramble' which at present is only known to occur in VC58. A return visit clearly needs to be made to this location as the greater the number of vice-counties in which any given undescribed plant occurs then the stronger the case for specific description.

With sunny conditions prevailing, brown hawker dragonflies, green veined white and large white butterflies were seen in flight. The carcasses of a smooth newt and a roach were also found.

Lunch was taken at the canal junction. Onward then along the Peak Forest Canal across the Tame into VC58. Here we were soon to find some more plants of *Octodicerias* as well as speckled woods and Lord de Tabley's bramble *Rubus warrenii* Sudre. After the railway bridge, the scene was somewhat more rural in character. Meadow sweet *Filipendula ulmaria* had finished flowering but there were still some species in bloom including sneezewort, wild goldenrod, and *Hieracium acuminatum*.

Two more species of dragonfly the brown bodied chaser and common darter graced the canal by Plantation Farm. We may presume that the ancestors of these dragonflies entertained most noble members of Victorian society, as Plantation Farm is the former residence of Mary Moffat, missionary and mother-in-law to Dr. David Livingstone.

After passing under a second railway bridge, plants of a horticultural bramble *Rubus elegantispinosus* (A. Schum.) H.E. Weber were found. Along the B road by the banks of the Tame we found an escaped loganberry *Rubus loganobaccus* L. Bailey.

As we approached the end of our foray, Maurice Lees savoured the flavour of a local bramble (referred to as false rubritinctus). With allotments very close by it is possible that the bramble may be of cultivated origin. The true *Rubus rubritinctus* W.C.R. Watson is known to have been cultivated and is only one of a number of bramble species that were introduced to Australia by settlers, which are now considered to be serious weed species by the Australian authorities (per. comm. A. Newton).

Finally as our excursion was most productive, perhaps we should explore further the urban canal systems of Manchester during the next Millennium.

## **Fletcher Moss Gardens**

**25<sup>th</sup> September 1999**

Only two members attended, so they took themselves round the gardens to admire the autumn vegetation.

## **Delamere Forest**

**23<sup>rd</sup> October 1999**

Although the two days before our walk had been rainy, the previous couple of weeks had been dry, so we were unsure how this would affect the crop of fungi. In the event we had a fruitful walk on a dry sunny day.

The fungus identified were: *Stereum hirsutum*, *Calocera viscosa*, *Collybia maculata*, *Nectria cinnabarina*, *Russula ochroleuca*, *Trametes versicolor*, Fly agaric, Clouded agaric, Porcelain fungus, Buttercap, Red Cracking boletus, Blusher, Cep (*Boletus edulis*), Stinkhorn (*Phallus impudicus*), Sulphur tuft, and Candlesnuff and what was thought to be *Agaricus haemorrhoidarius*. One fungus later identified as *Phaeolepiota aurea* is rare but has been found previously in Delamere. Not recorded in this area before, was *Tricholoma orirubens* - it resembles a lepiota but develops red edges to the gills some time later. Map references and details were sent to John Taylor who identified the specimen. A common fungus *Inocybe eutheles* is very like the previous species and had Margaret McCormick puzzled.

We were rather preoccupied with fungi so did not fully check out the flora, but several flowers were still in bloom - Pineappleweed and Cut-leaved Cranesbill.

Nine members and one guest attended. A bonus was the huge crop of sweet chestnuts, which many of us collected.