

The Wild Flower Society

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Plant species found at Meetings

2004 Forest of Bowland 25th to 27th May Main Meeting

Leader: Peter Jepson

This report was written by Susan Grimshaw and appeared in the Spring 2005 magazine Number 462 on pages 20, 21 and 22.

Forget the stereotyped image of Lancashire, Coronation Street and mill chimneys. Imagine instead a place where luscious green pastures and flower-filled hay meadows cover broad glaciated valleys and rise up the hillsides to meet high moorland fells. Imagine crystal clear, trout filled rivers rippling over stones where dippers bob and dive. Imagine fresh, unpolluted air, quiet roads, old stone-built villages, ducks and donkeys on village greens. Imagine too finding globeflowers, bird's-eye primroses, chickweed wintergreen, bog rosemary, mountain everlasting, three different clubmosses, dutch rush, bird cherry, fairy foxgloves.. .and dozens more besides, all in one small part of Lancashire.

Those of us who were fortunate enough to attend Peter Jepson's Main Meeting do not have to imagine these things because we experienced in reality the beauties of the Trough of Rowland, Lancashire's little known Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

We met Peter on the first day at Higher Hodder Bridge and watched the trout in the river below before setting forth on our first walk, along the bank of the River Hodder. The path led first through woodland, predominantly oak, ash and wych elm. Here we soon encountered the graceful and elegant *Festuca altissimum* (tall fescue). In the flower-rich fields alongside the river *Saxifraga granulata* (meadow saxifrage) and *Stellaria nemorum* (wood stitchwort) were seen. Whilst crossing one of the fields our leader's hawk-like eyes caught sight of some tiny leaves of *Ophioglossum vulgatum* (adderstongue fern) amongst the buttercups. Penetrating into the next wood Peter pointed out the tall, unbranched stems of *Equisetum hyemale* (rough horsetail) and the dainty *Phegopteris connectilis* (beech fern). We retraced our steps to the sound of goosanders in the river and were fortunate enough to get glimpses of those beautiful birds.

We ate lunch on a quiet roadside verge which commanded views across the valley to the fells beyond and where lapwings were tumbling and calling in the adjacent fields. We even saw a couple of lapwing chicks with their parents crossing the road.

The next stop, after a scenic drive, was a grassland SSSI. Having crossed a field occupied by a bull we entered Paradise! No words of mine can adequately describe the scene. The field, with its profusion of flowers, fell away to the wide valley of the upper Hodder and was set against a panoramic backdrop of fells, with Ingleborough just visible in the far distance. Looking down the slope one of the objects of our visit was immediately visible, butter-yellow drifts in the midst of the multi-coloured vegetation. Here were several great patches of *Trollius europaeus* (globeflower), surely one of the most exquisite flowers in Britain, at the height of its perfection. We admired it from above for some time before descending to look closely at its "orbed moons of pale yellow". We could have stayed

looking at it for a long time, but another of Britain's loveliest flowers was clothing an area of shorter grass nearby! This was *Primula farinosa* (bird's-eye primrose), an amazing sight, growing in sufficient quantity to give a pink cast to this part of the field. Also worthy of mention were the huge amounts of *Valeriana dioica* (marsh valerian), scatterings of *Lathyrus linifolius* (bitter vetch), one *Dactylorhiza purpurella* (northern marsh-orchid) and a few *Orchis mascula* (early- purple orchid). There was also a good assortment of sedges which our leader very kindly helped us to identify. Our visit was made even more special by the constant bubbling song of the local curlews.

We could have lingered in the meadow for the rest of the day, but another site beckoned, so we re-negotiated the bull (actually he was a very docile chap) and drove off upwards to the bleak moorland tops. What a contrast it was! From a golden meadow bathed in sunshine we found ourselves on a cold, boggy, windswept moor. However, we had not squelched long in the sphagnum before the object of our desire was discovered. This was *Andromeda polifolia* (bog rosemary), a real treasure with its little round pink bells. We were also delighted to see *Vaccinium oxycoccos* (cranberry) in flower on its surprisingly thin little thread-like stems. On this first day Peter Jepson had taken us to three completely different habitats, full of exciting plants, yet all within a comparatively small area.

On the second morning we met at Dunsop Bridge. This village is the exact centre of Britain, a telephone kiosk on the village green has a plaque inside informing everyone of the fact. From here we drove to Marshaw Clough where our leader had made special arrangements for parking and access with the Abbeystead Estate. We kept to the track between steepish hillsides of rough moorland, but every so often diverted up interesting flushes to hunt. There was a good variety of plants to be found, *Triglochin palustris* (marsh arrow-grass), *Eleocharis quinqueflora* (few- flowered spike-rush), *Polygala serpyllifolia* (heath milkwort), in a surprising variety of colours, and *Pinguicula vulgaris* (common butterwort) with its starfish leaves to name but a few.

However, our aim was to find the 'Big Four' rarities of the dough. Just before lunch Pam Chubb spied the first of them, *Trientalis europaeus* (chickweed wintergreen), such a fragile little plant to be growing in such an exposed place. A foray into the bracken on the hillside led to the discovery of many more plants. After lunch, eaten besides a babbling brook, we clambered along the moorland flank, bent double, looking for the other three rarities. Soon to be discovered was *Myosotis stolonifera* (pale forget-me-not), pale and insignificant looking, but rather scarce. Shortly afterwards, among the heather and sphagnum, David Nelson discovered that elusive little treasure, *Listera cordata* (lesser twayblade), just as our leader, Peter, found the fourth, *Eriophorum latifolium* (broad-leaved cotton-grass). Leaving Marshaw Clough we headed off to the Brennand Valley and en-route were fortunate enough to see two amazing sights. One was the treeless hillsides covered with a carpet of bluebells. The other was a hen harrier soaring overhead. The total English population, just ten pairs, of this rare bird is found in Bowland.

The Brennand Valley proved to be yet another interesting site. A great host of Equisetums on the marshy banks of the River Brennand caused a few problems of identification! *Equisetum variegatum* (variegated horsetail) managed to evade us, but we did find both *Equisetum x litorale* (shore horsetail) and *E. font-queri* (Skye horsetail). We also saw three very attractive ferns, *Oreopteris limbosperma* (lemon-scented fern), *Cystopteris fragilis* (brittle bladder-fem) and *Diyopteris affinis* (scaly male-fern).

Our final morning commenced on the village green at Slaidburn where certain members of the party disgraced themselves by tackling the children's Assault Course there. The first very pleasurable find of the morning was a big clump of *Cirsium heterophyllum* (melancholy thistle) growing on the stony riverbank. A wall in the vicinity had an

established population of the non-Kent (lamb's-tail). Sauntering through the nearby hay meadows we came across a superb *Prunus padus* (bird cherry), which was a considerable tree for this species, both in height and width and it was smothered in huge spikes of white blossom, at the very peak of perfection.

Our next stop was the sandy "beach" at Stocks Reservoir where we found *Juncus filiformis* (thread rush) growing en masse. This is a relatively easy rush to identify as its flower cluster is half way, or even lower, down the stem. Also on the muddy sand were flowering plants of *Littorella uniflora* (shoreweed) with the male plants waving their long slender stamens in the air. Proceeding into Gisburn Forest we visited other sites for *Trollius* (this one beneath deciduous trees) and *Primula farinosa*. Spikes of *Listera ovata* (common twayblade) were an added bonus. Travelling on to Tosside we re-entered Gisburn Forest and walked to a disused quarry now well colonized by young *Picea sitchensis* (Sitka spruce) and *Pinus contorta* (lodgepole pine) whose pollen was billowing out in clouds. Quite incredibly three species of clubmoss grow here and Peter showed them all to us. Surely this is the most easily accessed site in Britain to discover *Lycopodium clavatum* (stag's-horn clubmoss), *Huperzia selago* (fir clubmoss) and *Diphasiastrum alpinum* (alpine clubmoss). One can only wonder at the knowledge and enthusiasm of our leader who had located these plants amongst all the look-alike fir seedlings and mosses.

After lunch we drove to another contrasting location passing en-route through a deep cutting in the limestone where the rocks and verges were ablaze with *Erinus alpinus* (fairy foxglove), an unforgettable sight. From nearby we ascended a limestone hill overlooking the town of Clitheroe. Puffing and panting we reached a stile at the top of the steep path, to be met by Lord and Lady Clitheroe and their son the Hon. Ralph Assheton! Peter had sought permission from Lord Clitheroe, as landowner, for our group to explore the hill. He had invited the family to join us following the interest they had shown in our visit. They were interested to discover that their hill held two special rarities for the area; *Antennaria dioica* (mountain everlasting) in its only Lancashire site and *Sesleria caerulea* (blue moor-grass) in its only site in Lancashire apart from the Morecambe Bay limestone. Both were suffering from the hot dry weather and took a bit of finding, but were well worth the search.

Whilst several of us had to leave to journey home, others continued through the BBC's "Bom and Bred" village to see *Geranium sylvaticum* (wood crane's-bill) and *Minuartia verna* (spring sandwort), the latter growing in profusion on some old lead mine spoils.

This was a very successful and happy Main Meeting which was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone who attended. Our sincere thanks are due to Peter Jepson who shared his expert local knowledge with us and arranged all the passes and permits needed to enable us to botanize on private land. I personally enjoyed every minute of the meeting and am very grateful to Peter for showing us such a super and varied selection of plants. My favourite new finds were *Andromeda* and *Trollius*. My favourite "old friends" were *Cirsium heterophyllum* and the gorgeous roadside displays of *Geum rivale* (water avens) and *Galium cruciata* (crosswort). I would recommend this very beautiful part of Lancashire to everyone; do visit it sometime!

SUSAN GRIMSHAW

Leader's postscript

The moorland springs of Rowland present an interesting taxonomic problem in their populations of forget-me-not. Near spring heads *Myosotis stolonifera* (pale forget-me-

not) occurs in association with *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* (opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage), *Montia fontana* (blinks) and the moss *Philonotis fontana*. However, in the rush dominated flushes near the foot of the slopes *M. stolonifera* is replaced by *Myosotis secunda* (creeping forget-me-not). I have been aware for sometime that in transitional areas there is an intermediate forget-me-not. These typically comprise of small plants but with slightly brighter blue flowers than those of typical *M. stolonifera*. Differences in hairiness of the stems, length of pedicel and shape of calyx lobes do not fit the latter species. A small piece of an intermediate plant, collected on the meeting, has grown reasonably well in cultivation, producing slightly larger flowers and appears to be sterile. May I speculate that this could be the hybrid between *M. secunda* and *M. stolonifera*, a combination not given by Kent or Stace. Here perhaps is an item worthy of further research.

Peter Jepson

The Wild Flower Society is the only national society created specifically for amateur botanists and wild flower lovers in the UK. We are a friendly group who like to meet up throughout the summer months to see and photograph British wild plants in their natural habitats. The Society has been running for over a century and proudly boasts a number of very eminent botanists and academics amongst our ranks with at least fourteen members having plants named after them!