

Cwmlladron, Churchstoke 14/5/19

Organisers: Lizzie Beare, Steve Attwood-Wright

Cwmlladron, or Robbers' Valley, runs from high on the side of the Kerry Ridgeway and forms a deep wooded valley. In years past robbers would hide in a cave in the cwm and attack drovers on their way home from market and rob them of their takings. These days the valley is more like a fairy glen than a fearful hideout for baddies. 27 members met at Churchstoke to condense into seven cars to make the journey to Pen-y-Cwm where we were kindly given permission to park. From here there were several walks, all including Cwmlladron which was the highlight of the day. It was a perfect spring day, Sunny and warm with just a faint breeze now and again. The lane banks were a riot of Bluebells, Stitchwort, Red Campion and Shining Cranesbill which seemed particularly prevalent this year. Other more hidden delights were Town Hall Clock, Crosswort, Dog Violets and several species of vetch, Bush, Common (but not so common) and Bitter Vetchling. At the crossing of the footpaths Kate and John Thorne went west to search for old botanical records in the Seven Wells area meanwhile the rest of us went East and in the very first field, Sue spotted a day flying moth and when it settled we could see two mating, their wing cases brilliant metallic gold in the sun. It was hard to get a photo and Sue tried again and again to get her camera to focus on the insects and their extraordinarily long antennae and not the grass waving in the breeze. Persistence prevailed and a photo achieved. The field was full of the early grass, Sweet Vernal, Field Woodrush and lots of Ladies Smock in a wet flush where a few members had wandered and put up a hare which sprinted off toward the cwm. Just before entering Cwmlladron itself we were surprised to find Common Lousewort.

On the path running diagonally down into the depths of the valley we saw Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage, Sanicle, Enchanter's Nightshade and more but the real treat was the steep bank dotted with dozens and dozens of Early Purple Orchids. These spikes of colour amongst the fresh green of the spring growth, the delicate shades of newly open tree leaves - wych elm, oak, hazel and very tardy ash - lichen and moss on fallen trees often hosting Wood Anemones or Windflowers which also carpeted the ground gave the valley an enchanted and enchanting ambience. I suspect the whole valley was once full of orchids but sheep have access to the brook for water and can't resist browsing on their way. We forded the brook, climbed out of the Cwm and reached the farm Lluesty. This was far enough for Mollie and Sonia and luckily Mollie's cousin lives there and gave them a reviving cup of tea and offered to drive them back to Pen-y-Cwm. I understand they had a very enjoyable afternoon. Some, on my recommendation I have to admit, took the bridleway back via Great and Little Argoed and up the hill overlooking the farms below and as far as Cadair Idris and Arran Fawddwy; it was a long haul up the hill and we were feeling guilty at being late when we heard a Yellowhammer calling and that made our day. Most members more sensibly took the shorter route back to Pen-y-Cwm via Pantglas and had time to enjoy the flowers on the bank and the views.

Finding venues for MFS teas can sometimes be challenging, but on this occasion it was easy peasy. A few phone calls and I was in touch with a quartet of ladies from the Churchstoke area who not only offered to make tea but invited us to use Churchstoke Hall as the venue. This privately owned house has a stunning Hall from 1591, beautiful brick built chimneys and a charming garden with a pond and mature trees. It was a perfect finale, sitting outside in the sun enjoying homemade quiche, cake, scones jam and cream. Thank you Ronnie, Sue and friends.