

## Hirnant, near Penybontfawr - Thursday 11th July, 2019

Organisers: Sue Southam and Sue Bosson

Hirnant is a small, picturesque hamlet about two and a half miles south-west of Penybontfawr, and only about 4 miles from Lake Vyrnwy. This is an area which often experiences more rainfall than other parts of the county, and the weather forecast was not promising - so it was with great delight that 31 members enjoyed a generally dry day, and wonderful views, with some interesting flora and fauna discoveries along the way.

Having met in Penybontfawr to 'decant' into a minimum number of cars, we proceeded to St Illog's Church, now a Community Centre, where we were able to eat our picnics before choosing from a number of walk options.

Several folk opted for the permissive path from Minffrwyd up towards Carnedd Das Eithin, the remains of a burial cairn probably dating back to the Bronze Age. Wynn Thomas, the owner of Minffrwyd, accompanied us on his quad bike, and was possibly rather surprised at our snail's pace as we tried to note down all the many and varied botanical finds. The banks of the zig-zag track were a picture, with extensive drifts of plants including Fox and Cubs and Mouse-ear Hawkweed easy to see, but other smaller species required a more 'hands and knees' approach, and plants such as Parsley Piert, Eyebright and Climbing Corydalis were soon added to our lists. Musk Mallow and Harebells made a wonderful combination, and higher up we found English Stonecrop and Slender St. John's Wort in profusion. Despite the rather overcast skies, there were occasional sunny spells which brought out several butterfly species, including Small Skipper, Small Heath, Meadow Brown, Painted Lady and Ringlet, which danced along the flowery banks.

Also alongside the track was perhaps the best record of the day - an interesting 'web' along the length of a hawthorn branch, containing a whole cluster of orange caterpillars with black heads! None of us recognised them, but on looking them up later they appeared to be the larvae of the Hawthorn Moth (*Scythropia crataegella* - a micro-moth). This was quickly confirmed by Peter Williams, our County Moth Recorder. It's a species which was only recorded for the first time in Montgomeryshire in 2013, and that was also the first record for North Wales - so it's quite a rarity, and there will now be another dot on the Montgomeryshire distribution map! Well done Hirnant!

The more energetic members reached the burial cairn, and were rewarded with surprisingly far-reaching views, as well as the iconic song of the skylark, and the high piping calls of numerous meadow pipits.

Other members chose walks on the opposite side of the valley, where they explored quiet lanes, organically managed meadows, woods and the Hirnant stream. Several day-flying moths were on the wing, including the Chimney Sweeper - a small sooty black moth with white edges to its wingtips. Its larvae feed on Pignut, and there was one field where this was

growing particularly profusely alongside the bridleway above the Hirnant stream, which was where the moths were spotted.

Ruth and Allan Dawes explored rather under-recorded monads nearby, which included quite a number of forestry tracks. Towards the end of the afternoon, as she set off down a very overgrown and wet track, Ruth's eye was caught by clumps of Bristle Club-rush. In one soggy, shaded linear strip she counted over 80 individual plants.

Stories and botanical samples were shared back at St Illog's, where Nicola and her 'team' (Wynn and Nicola's husband) served up an excellent tea. Our sincere thanks to them all, but especially to Nicola, who made and prepared all the food single-handedly. Our 'tea-money' will be added to the funds collected for the maintenance and running costs of St Illog's - a really worthy cause, as we all agreed this is a very special venue.