

Friog and Fairbourne - 19th May 2015
Organisers - Sylvia and Michael Backhouse

The day was cool and cloudy as members of the Society were sped through the soft rolling countryside into the dramatic and mountainous Snowdonia National Park. The drama was heightened by an astounding hail storm that lashed the coach's windows. Passing Dolgellau, peace was restored, and the roads were dry. The road grew narrower with many difficult pinch points as the coach travelled through tiny hamlets towards the coast. Members alighted in Fairbourne where they chose from a variety of walks or boarded the Miniature Light Railway train which was soon to leave its station and take its passengers to the end of the peninsular. Here are sand dunes, sheltered mud flats, and salt marsh. The main walk, which was inland and through the tiny village of Friog, swiftly left the village behind. It was not long before views over Fairbourne and the sea could be seen. Bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* were growing on most of this walk and were often accompanied by Common Dog-violet *Viola riviniana*, Golden male-fern *Dryopteris affinis*, Hard-fern *Blechnum spicant*, Navelwort *Umbelicus rupestris*, and Hart's-tongue fern *Asplenium scolopendrium*. The path dropped down to a tiny lane where the banks of a swiftly flowing stream were covered in large carpets of Ramsons *Allium ursinum*. It was here that a waterfall cascaded down a sheer wall of rock, and for everyone's enjoyment, in the background was the delightful sound of wood warblers. The path left the lane and rose along the righthand slope of a valley that followed the lower edge of a wood where native trees struggled with difficult growing conditions. A cacophony of bird song descended on walkers' ears. Contributors of the songs were chiffchaff, willow warbler, whitethroat, blackcap, and garden warbler.

This music was often joined by the powerful call of the song thrush. Far below, where horses grazed, the meadow was white with daisies *Bellis perennis*. The cheerful yellow of gorse *Ulex europaeus* in bloom injected brightness into the scene. Soon there was a glimpse of the Mawddach estuary and it was not long before the woodland was left behind and more open hillside discovered. Now a fresh breeze had found members and there were terrific views over the estuary, Barmouth, Shell Island, and the Lleyn Peninsular. The walk now reached an altitude of 750 feet, and it was here that the area was mined for lead, copper, and silver, during the period 1851 to 1863, followed in later years by slate. Broad Buckler-fern *Dryopteris dilatata*, Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, Hard-fern *Blechnum spicant*, Bitter Vetch *Lathyrus linifolius*, and Wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella* braved these steep hill slopes, as did Common Cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium* and Sheep's-bit *Jasione montana*. Just by a stone ruin there was a fleeting glimpse of a merlin that startled one bird watcher with its jet-like flight. This was followed by a hard battering with large hailstones which made people dive for cover against buildings and under trees. The approaching weather could be observed from this high vantage point as it drifted across the sea towards the land, with sunlight occasionally picking out Barmouth and Shell Island. A kestrel hovered over open, rough, reed-covered pasture. Crossing a swollen stream was a little tricky but the intrepid members were stoic in fording the rushing water. Here was found the strange looking Town Hall Clock *Adoxa moschatellina* and Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*. With Common Lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*, a lover of wet, acid grassland and moor, and Primroses *Primula vulgaris* beneath our feet members descended the hill. In one particularly wet patch there was the insectivorous Common

Butterwort *Pinguicula vulgaris* in flower, and the insectivorous Common Sundew *Drosera rotundifolia* amongst a bed of sedge. Stonechat and meadow pipit enjoyed these conditions, and a marauding buzzard hung threateningly overhead. The slate spoil was home to Maidenhair Spleenwort *Asplenium trichomanes*, Wall-rue *Asplenium ruta-muraria*, Black Spleenwort *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum*, and Maritime Pine *Pinus pinaster*. The male and female flowers of this Maritime pine were very prominent. Here was a tunnel that had been hewn out of solid rock, beyond which were cathedral-sized steep cliffs that surrounded the Blue Lake. This 43 feet deep lake was indeed very blue and had been created to supply Fairbourne with fresh water. It was now primarily used by brown trout, aqualung divers, and occasional swimmers in very hot weather. Leaving the wonderful Blue Lake behind, the path dropped swiftly, and it was here that the bright green leaves of Enchanter's-nightshade *Circaea lutetiana* and Smooth Sow thistle *Sonchus oleraceus* were identified. The track led to a tiny lane with a rushing stream that was edged with Ramsons and Hemlock Water-Dropwort *Oenanthe crocata*. Members passed along the main road through Friog and turned down the tiny lane near the Old Toll Cottage to the sea defences which were climbed to reveal the vastness of the beautiful Fairbourne beach. Here were the usual seaside plants, namely Sea campion *Silene uniflora*, Thrift *Armeria*, Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, and Ivy-leaved Toadflax *Cymbalaria muralis* to name just a few. A stiff breeze came off the sea as members rested for a while. A brisk walk brought everyone back to the coach. Other members walked the fine beach to the peninsular where many great black-backed gulls and herring gulls were seen on the estuary accompanied by a solitary little egret and a pair of oystercatchers. In all a combined list of 44 species of

birds were seen. Other members walked inland and enjoyed the peaceful scenery of the Mawddach estuary. The coach took members to the Royal Ship Hotel in Dolgellau where a very good tea was served by very pleasant staff. The homeward journey was quite dramatic as a very black cloud with a startlingly bright rainbow preceded the coach for countless miles. The countryside was further enhanced and lit up by many spotlights of bright sunshine.