

Montgomeryshire Field Society Tuesday 2nd October 2018

Llanfechain outing

Although my name was originally listed as one of the organisers, it was Maureen Preen, Jane Hudson and Fran Holland who made all the arrangements, but I arrived at Llanfechain early, and directed the members and visitors to the correct parking area, while Jane was busy putting up MFS signs along the route, including those which warned that walkers were in the lane. Fran ticked people off her list (there were about 40 of us) and handed out maps and written directions for the two suggested walks - one of about 4.5 miles along quiet lanes and tracks, with a steady climb to the lower slopes of Jericho and Gomen-Gastell hills; the other a shorter option of about 2.5 miles, keeping closer to the village.

Many of us ate our picnic lunch in the car park under a large horse chestnut tree, then one group, which included our fungus expert friend, Neville Walters, explored the circular graveyard (no corners for the devil to lurk in!) which has a man-made mound said to be the preaching-mound of St Garmon. The church is believed to be the most complete Norman church in Montgomeryshire. Although fungi were not numerous today, Neville was delighted with his finds, which included the fragile-looking aptly named Horsehair Parachute fungus *Marasmius androsaceus* amongst the graves.

I joined the group of walkers opting for the 'full walk', noting the huge display of rich orange Fox and Cubs *Pilosella aurantiaca* in the cemetery as we proceeded out of the village and across the bridge over the River Cain. The weather was kind to us, and as we climbed along the bridleway, jackets were shed and many a breather was taken before we reached a resting place with marvellous views of the Breiddens, Long Mountain, the Wrekin, Shropshire plain and beyond.

The aim of the MFS is to observe, preserve and record the flora and fauna of Montgomeryshire, so it was great to have our county botany recorder and president of the society, Dr Kate Thorne, with us, along with other experienced botanists. Armed with lists of plant species which had not been recorded here since 2000, they were now recording finds for the 2020 BSBI (Botanical Society of the British Isles). I was told that the hectad SJ12 (10x10km square) has been very well recorded, with 80% of pre-2000 species already re-found, this being the best recorded hectad in Montgomeryshire.

These experts in their field are always happy to explain what they are doing, and I marvelled at their patient detective work as they searched for hybrid oaks, or Fragrant Agrimony *Agrimonia odorata* as opposed to Agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria*, or stashed away specimens in samples bags for further study. One such plant was an Evening Primrose with rather small flowers. When I looked in The Wild Flower Key by Frances Rose, I read that 'Evening Primroses are a very difficult group, as plants of Large-flowered, Common and Small-flowered often form hybrid swarms'!

While all this was going on, the ornithologists were making lists of birds seen and heard.

On the well-marked map I could see that I was passing a pretty little cottage called Pentre, the route now heading down towards a lane and the entrance to Bodynfoel Estate, with the option of a final stretch on a permissive path alongside the River Cain. At the cottage I met our Secretary and Excursions Secretary, two keen botanists, who had been on the fungus foray with Neville, heading in the opposite direction along the 4 mile route the rest of us had just undertaken, so keen were they to complete all the options open to us, in their dedicated botanising.

The merest drizzle marked the end of our lovely day as we meandered along the riverbank, passing the steep-sided motte and bailey before reaching the village hall where the W.I. provided us with a splendid tea. Here I found Ruth Dawes, another plant expert, clutching a sample bag of fumitory found on the riverbank. I had noticed that plant on passing, but it wasn't until I looked it up in "Rose" that I read there are about 8 Fumariaceae in this family! I asked Ruth what she had found most memorable on this most varied of field trips, expecting to hear of some rare plant find. "Well", said Ruth, at the viewpoint I've never seen such a lot of dead tractors in that one field, and it was lovely to meet a couple from the village who were 'sticking' - so few people do these days"!

For full species' lists please see centre pages of annual report. Sue Bosson