

**Coed Cae-heulen & Coed Pant y Bating, nr Machynlleth
16 September 2015**

Organizers Lizzie Beare and Sue Southam

The weekend before this Wednesday outing the weather forecast was dire for the Machynlleth area with driving rain sweeping in from the west. In true MFS spirit no arrangements were changed. Most members arrived via Brigands Inn or Cemmaes Road and took the A489 towards Mach, turning left after Penegoes to Forge and left again towards our venue which lies alongside the mountain road back eastwards past Glaslyn, through Dylife and onto Staylittie and Llanidloes. Imagine the consternation of all to see a "Road Closed Ahead" sign. It did not portend well, would we reach our destination before the closure, would the gate to this privately owned wood be unlocked as arranged, would the tea be as planned and above all would everyone from Llanidloes manage to find their way past the closure and indeed was the road closure fact or fiction.

In fact it all turned out well in the end the closure was fact - not fiction - but east of our venue., Sheila Turner was the only driver coming from Llanidloes and in her resourceful way with a good knowledge of the area arrived only slightly past the appointed hour. Furthermore the weather was dry, mild and occasionally sunny and the gate had been unlocked by Sam Brown from UPM Tlhill who manage these woods. Folks set off map in hand advised to stick to the path marked as many forestry tracks which look promising end abruptly in brambles and impenetrable gorse or woodland. The route led first through conifer woodland of Coed Pant y Bating with wide rides sporting vast numbers of Common Centaury, just past flowering sadly - they must have been spectacular a month or two before. Then through a field with a wet flush supporting sedges and water plants the route climbed to a high point with views of Abecegir and mountains in the distance. From here it was back into the forestry now in Coed Cae-heulen on a good wide track which led out into farmland and onto a lane off which a bridlepath sloped downhill across a pasture back into Coed Cae-heulen. Great Wood-rush with its dark green strap leaves and tall arching rush heads, the delicate Climbing Corydalis, Black spleenwort hiding in the rocks and Wild angelica standing tall in the damp rides were all found. Frogs, crickets, a common lizard, birds and butterflies were spotted. Here there are fine stands of Oak and the understorey is much more open. It is in this area that the rare (in Montgomery) Red Wood Ants *Formica rufa* have been found. We had arranged for Mike Green of Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to meet us here at 2.30 to show us the nests and explain the habitat work being done to allow the ants to thrive. Whilst we waited on the path members started noticing Red Wood Ants everywhere, industriously going about their business on this mild day. They are large at least twice the size of a common ant and the middle section of workers is very obviously orangey-red. We looked for their nests, without leaving the path, and eventually found two, both looking very active. No sign of Mike Green by 3.15 and we guessed the road closure had delayed him but we had to make our way to the other end of the woods where the cars were parked in order to drive to Plas Machynlleth for tea at 4.15pm - and a very fine tea it was too.

Butterflies and birds seen and heard: Speckled Wood, Painted Lady; Red Kite, Chiffchaff, Blue Tit, Swallow, Buzzard, Great Tit, Goldcrest, Raven, Robin, Herring Gull, Chaffinch, Blackbird, Jay, Goldfinch, Wren, Carrion Crow, Nuthatch, Song Thrush, Meadow Pipit and Great Spotted Woodpecker.