

Beneath The Ffridd, Montgomery 11th September 2022
Organisers: Maureen Preen, Debbie Freeman, Philippa Young

'Ffridd' or 'coedcae' is the area between the enclosed lower fields and unenclosed hill or moorland. The first written mention of ffridd dates back to the 14th Century in Wales, believed to come from the Middle English word 'frith' meaning woodland or wooded countryside. Nowadays it can be a diverse mixture of grass, heath, bracken and scrub. Fridd is a recognised visual, historic and cultural component of the Welsh countryside and is important for wildlife as a link between upland and lowland, providing shelter and food.

On the Sunday after our 75th celebration tea and talk from Iolo Williams, a select group gathered in Montgomery, promised sloping walks and sweeping views of Mwynder Maldwyn / Mellow Montgomeryshire, as Iolo had quoted.

The morning mists thankfully rose to leave overcast skies and a dry day. The walk began through the centre of our county town where gardens still bloomed and butterflies fed. On the recce, Holly Blue, Common Blue and Meadow Brown butterflies had appeared, in September these were replaced by Red Admiral and Large Whites. Then up towards the Ffridd and a short stretch of woodland featuring magnificent beech trees.

A large fraction of the group took the shorter, but steeper, option to walk over the Iron Age fort, Ffridd Faldwyn, where raven and buzzard flew. The lower route crossed several reseeded grass fields, where a still-running small stream, surprising after this summer's drought, provided for growth of water plants. Through the barley stubble, past gorse bushes we climbed to cattle pasture (complete with fairy ring), meeting others who had taken the fort path going the reverse route.

Through a (very tidy) farm and up the narrow lane with tall hedges. Following the dry summer and first rain for weeks, some wild flowers were producing second blooms, yarrow and meadowsweet for example. Butterflies basked in the hedgerow tops. Ripe and ripening blackberries weighed down the branches.

There was plenty of opportunity to admire sweeping views across the countryside. Fields where crops had been cut were still pale brown after the drought, though grazed pasture was recovering. The 'official' route followed the lane past Montgomery Castle down to the centre of town again. Other routes were available, and used.

A visit to the small nature reserve alongside the car park discovered a tangle of waterside plants, including Purple Loosestrife, a wagtail and fruiting elderberries. Then on to The Abermule Inn where chunky sandwiches and cream scones provided a filling and delicious conclusion to the outing. Report Philippa Young