

Cefn Goleu Wood, Bwlch y Cibau 24/5/23

Organisers: Lizzie Beare, Philippa Young, Fran Holland, Judy Abbey

Another beautiful day in a spell of fine weather in the second half of May greeted us as more than 35 members gathered at The Barn, Cefn Goleu the home of Andy and Sue Hughes who have lived here for 29 years. At that time the undergrowth of the small wood was grazed to the ground and isolated by small heavily grazed fields in spite of being an ASNW with its oldest trees being around 120 - 150 years old.

The other wood to the west is bigger at c 15 acres of sloping ground and designated also as an Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland but had mostly been grazed by sheep. The Hughes bought it 5½ years ago and spent a lot of effort endeavouring to keep the sheep out. This was finally achieved recently and the transformation has been spectacular.

Andy gave an introductory talk about the plans and achievements of their management and what we might see. He led one walk starting westwards and Philippa led another eastwards which is largely level but with a few challenging slopes. Ruth and Lizzie also set off eastwards with the aim of completing circuits of both woods by using the ridge between the two and negotiating a 'hurdle' (actually a very substantial bullock-detering barricade) and making a list of plants.

In 29 years the bare fields surrounding the east wood have now been developed into scrubland which is self-seeding providing habitat for insects and breeding birds and shelter for tree saplings to thrive amongst a variety of trees, and rough grass. The older part of the wood has been managed to develop understorey. The scrubland was too thick to penetrate and the land falling away to the right too daunting to tackle but even from the path some 40 species were noted. Over the stile at the end of the wood we climbed the steep slope up to the ridge. The views towards Bryn Mawr and Four Crosses to the East and The Berwyns to the North were splendid. On the dry heathy ridge we found Field Madder, Common Vetch (not so common) and Wall Speedwell, all miniature gems and we heard the Cuckoo calling across the valley. Further along the ridge on a northern slope Ruth hunted down the leaves of Adder's-tongue, barely 1cm long, there was quite a colony of them.

The west wood was a picture of Bluebells, Greater Stitchwort and Red Champion and a good variety of trees providing shade for the taxing pull up the slope from the lowest point near a large gooseberry bush and past badger diggings. We spotted Wall Lettuce, Yellow Archangel (the true wild one) and Ruth found the leaves of Moschatel or to use its common name Town Hall Clock which so perfectly describes the unusual 5 facets of its tiny flower, which appears so briefly in April. We were surprised by lots of Aspen saplings growing along the track without having noticed adult trees nearby. Aspens sucker readily so maybe there was a tree at that point sometime in the past and the saplings were eaten off by the sheep. We were flagging somewhat by this time and thinking of how nice a cup of tea would be, so with a last search of the log near the entrance for a lizard that often basks there we left the wood and came across Kate finding some good plants in the short turf on the south facing slope - Early Hair-grass, Birdsfoot, Parsley Piert, Squirrel-tail Fescue and Slender Meadow-grass amongst them.

Tea was waiting at The Barn, thanks to Sue Hughes, with sandwiches and cakes provided by the four on the organising team. What a thoroughly enjoyable day spent in beautiful surroundings with like-minded people on land being encouraged to return to nature. Thank you Andy and Sue Hughes.

Report by Lizzie Beare