

CNS



CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY

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Cover photo THE FOREST GIANT . FOREST OF DEAN by BRUCE McDONALD

PRESIDENTIAL RAMBLINGS - June 2010

After the long hard winter which seemed to last for an eternity, we are currently experiencing an explosion of colour in the countryside; nature is "catching up" and the Spring is finally here in all of its glory. I cannot remember ever seeing so many rich, colourful dandelions in the fields at one time, and the bluebells seem set for a magnificent season.

The (unpronounceable) south eastern Icelandic volcano which spewed forth thousands of metric tons of volcanic ash and caused so much havoc is at present quiescent. It is interesting to note that in comparative terms the eruption was "minor" and that another, possibly larger eruption is overdue from its sister volcano a few kilometres to the east.

As man advances in knowledge and technology, we are still vulnerable to the natural forces which surround us. This time it was fine dust blasted into the jet stream. Formerly it has been earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, plagues, the odd ice age and countless celestial bodies bombarding the earth from space. Thank goodness that we are living through predominantly one of the earth's more tranquil periods !!

The badger cull is set to go ahead in West Wales following the failure of the latest legal challenges. We await with concern and interest to see if it will proceed without violent protest on the ground.

A couple of weeks ago your Council met and enjoyed the hospitality of Joan Andrew's whilst provisionally drafting the Indoor Meetings and Field Meetings programme for next year . A large measure of the work had already been put in place by the Meetings Secretaries and a thoroughly varied and interesting set of fixtures tentatively arranged. I look forward to seeing you all during the course of the forthcoming Meetings Programmes.

As I write this commentary, the dust cloud has returned and is over Cardiff. This has set me thinking of the possible effects on wildlife in and around Iceland. I wonder how far the measurable effects are spread and for how long they will be noticed ?

Roger Milton

OUTDOOR MEETINGS June to August 2010

For further information on any of these events or to let us know you are coming please e-mail Bruce on outdoor@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk . Non-members are welcome

Saturday 5th June
Start time 10am

Cwm Cadlan
Packed lunch

A chance to visit Cwm Cadlan, a National Nature Reserve on the edge of the Brecon Beacons, led by CCW reserves Manager Jon Wohlgemuth. It forms part of the largest stretch of fen meadows in Wales studded with species-rich, lime-enriched flushes. Meet at reserve entrance which is 0.75 miles from Penderyn up Cwm Cadlan road and on the right (Grid ref: SN 9545 0982). Parking is very limited so please let Bruce know if you plan to come.

Monday 7th June
Start time 7pm

Coryton
2-3 hours

As part of biodiversity week Cardiff Naturalist's Society will yet again be leading this popular public walk around the Coryton roundabout (junction 32 on M4). Hopefully we shall see again the unusual orchid variant now verified as *Rhodochila*. Meet at the top of Longcross drive just past Asda off Coryton roundabout. (ST 137 814)

Sunday 20th June
Start time 10am

Parc Slip
3 hours

Margaret and John Samuel will be leading us around Parc Slip nature reserve. This 305 acre reserve has a mix of woodland, wetland and meadow and is managed by the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales. Meet at the Visitor Centre SS879 835 and postcode CF32 0EH. Leave the M4 at junction 36 and follow the B4281 towards Aberkenfig. Turn right by the Fountain Restaurant onto Fountain Road and the reserve car park is on the left approximately a quarter of a mile up the road. Follow the duck signs. The walk will take 2.5 to 3 hours, no steep hills.

Saturday 3rd July

Start time 10am

Cardiff Bay

Packed lunch

This will be the first circumnavigation of Cardiff Bay by the Nats made possible by the opening of a footbridge across the River Ely, scheduled for early June. We hope to record all wildlife seen on the circuit which will include fresh and salt water, wetlands and parkland. The distance is around 6.5 miles – mostly flat and on surfaced paths. Meet at the public car park by St Davids Hotel, Havannah Street, CF10 5SD (Grid ref: ST 189 742). Parking charges apply – we shall aim to be back by 4pm.

Wednesday 14th July

Start time 6pm

Kenfig

3 hours

This walk around the Kenfig Nature Reserve will be led by Roy Bailey-wood and we shall be concentrating on the later orchids such as the Helleborines. Meet at the Visitor Centre entrance (CF33 4PT or Grid Ref: SS 799 812). Note that the Visitor Centre will not be open so no facilities available.

Thursday 29th July

Start time 6.30pm

Hailey Park

1.5 hours

We shall be teaming up again with the Friends of Hailey Park for a public walk around this new wildlife area in Llandaff, Cardiff on the edge of the River Taff. Birds, blooms and some sweep-netting to see what insects are about. Meet at the car park to Hailey Park, Radyr Road entrance.

Saturday 31st July

Start time 10am

Cwm Rhondda Fach

Packed lunch

Rob and Linda Nottage will be leading this exploration of the upper reaches of the Rhondda Fach and site of the former Maerdy Colliery to see an interesting variety of scenery and wildlife including ivy-leaved bellflower and keeled skimmer dragonflies. . A gentle 5-6 mile stroll mainly on firm tracks but with an optional return on some rougher paths. Meet on the northern outskirts of Maerdy opposite the Avon Rubber Factory at grid ref SS972 990. Parking on nearby streets, no toilets or refreshments.

BARBEQUE

A barbeque has been arranged for Wednesday July 21st at Cosmeston, and will start at about 1900hrs.

Following the barbeque there will be a bat hunt, after this Tony Campbell will lead a Glow worm hunt.

The details have not yet been finalised, our website will update the times if necessary.

Children will be especially welcome at this event.

Terry and Joyce

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FIELD TRIP TO THE FOREST OF DEAN

Saturday, 20th March

We may not have been using the Tardis but our time-travelling took us way back in time. We encountered Charles II and even Elizabeth I. We skirmished with Pansanger and Shaden Tuft. We even confronted the Forest Giant. Getting up close to these Leviathans was a humbling but rewarding experience.



Gazing at a Mighty Oak

Rendezvous point was the Speech House or Speche House as it is depicted on the hotel. Built in 1676 as a hunting lodge, it then established itself as administrative centre of the Forest of Dean and the biggest room became the Verderers' Court which was where one went to make a speech. The role of Verderer was to safeguard the 'vert', the greenery of the forest and particularly the venison on behalf of the king and the

office is believed to have been instigated by King Cnut (Canute) in the 11th century who first introduced forest laws. The Court still operates and retains the authority to impose the death penalty for stealing the Royal deer, although the sentence must be carried out on the gibbet outside the hotel and this has been missing for many years.

The Forest of Dean is the second largest Crown forest after the New Forest with 20 million trees and claims to be the largest oak forest. And it was the oaks that we had come to see – our route mapped out by our guide for the day, Tony Titchen. First, some basics, as it was explained that *Quercus robur*, the English or Pedunculate Oak, established itself after the



Sessile Stalk



Sessile Bud

last ice-age from two separate populations; one from northern Spain and the other from the more easterly side of Europe. Jays played a major part in this with their skill at redistributing acorns. Tony started by distinguishing between the English Oak (*robur*) and the Sessile Oak (*petraea*).

The leaf stalk on the

Sessile is longer (see photo) and the terminal bud is larger than those surrounding it (see photo).

The next section covering the trees is in Tony's own words:

“10 of us met up at 11 a.m on a damp and dismal day. This did not matter too much as the trees were totally leafless and the all important shapes and dimensions of the trees were evident. The bracken was dead, which helped us to get up to the trees . We looked first of all at a tree not far from the Pygmy Pinetum garden centre which everyone seems to have missed. I called this “The Pygmy Oak”! I pointed out it was a *Quercus robur* (the European English Oak). This tree was special because it had an elephantine thickening of the bole by the ground. This to me is only one of two known to me in the area – the other being the well known “Verderers Oak which we looked at later before lunch. I don't know really how this basal thickening forms? It may be due to the young tree having its upper branches removed in the first thirty years of growth by a practice known as “shredding” – practised by the charcoal burners who were wanting to provide fuel for the iron furnaces, which were all over the Forest. I expect you know that they need the extra heat that charcoal gives to smelt the ore. I mentioned I had seen a similar feature in 200 plus year old Tulip Trees (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) and in some Hybrid Planes (*Platanus x hispanica*) at Tortworth Court which had come from the Crimean region of S E Europe, being well over 100 yrs

old. I doubt if these were caused by shredding as with the oak. We were able to see nearby some oaks which had taken on the typical “cabbage” effect of the species without straight limbs. Straight limbs are a feature of the other native species *Q. petraea*. I was able to show you the clustered buds of the oaks. With *Q. robur* they are practically all the same size but the Sessile oak has a very prominent apical winter bud which allows the branches and side twigs to grow upwards and outward in a near straight direction.

THE MACHEN OAK

Edward Machen was the Deputy Surveyor of Dean in the early C19th and was responsible for shipbuilding during the Napoleonic Wars and the fleets regeneration after the war. He lived at Eastbach Court - not far away. His oak stands on the high ridge N E of Edge End. Its split trunk suggested it was once pollarded - Ref 596136. From the Eastbach turning on the A 4136, drive 400 yards towards Coleford. Take tarmac entry on right and park at the T ahead. Turn left and follow path to the oak past some large beeches growing in a row. The height is given as 64ft with a diameter of 195cm. The girth is 20-21ft Age over 300 years. Machen was the Deputy Surveyor from 1808 -1854. At the end of his watch steel ships were in production and wooden ships on the way out. We drove back to the Speech House area to park half way up Speech House Hill on the right.

We were going to see the VERDERERS OAK - Grid ref 619119—opposite the cottages on the New Fancy Rd. When we got there I explained about the Hawfinches - although we never saw any. Before going to the oak I explained about the hollies planted in the region amongst the oaks. These were planted over 300 yrs ago as food for the deer roaming the Kings Hunting Forest. This oak is the stoutest oak in the forest—over 23ft in girth. The shape is similar to the Pygmy Oak we first saw. The swollen basal part of the bole is covered in adventitious shoots which can develop into lower branches. If you remember I said trees have to increase their girth each year if they are going to survive—the leaves on the adventitious shoots add to the limited food factory in the reduced crown. This was due to early pollarding. Present height is 17m (56ft whilst the age is easily 350-400 yrs). This was one of the trees which had to be left as timber for ship and house building. The coppiced wood was for charcoal to feed the smelters of iron ore which had been mined in the forest.

WE THEN HAD LUNCH

After lunch we drove down past New Fancy View - the site of a mine in the C20th. On the way we drove past a roadside oak called the Fancy View Oak – only about 200 years old but as it is right by the road. Grid Ref 627094 . This oak is considered to have been an oak which grew up in a hedgerow. We were on our way to the SHADEN TUFT OAK. Ref 630092. This oak is over 300yrs old and tall at 74ft , with a girth of 19ft and a heavily burred trunk. Most likely pollarded at a 15ft height and 4 stems have grown on instead of the one leader. There would have been many more growing up but all the others were cut out to encourage strong growth on these four. Very often this cut foliage would be fed to the deer in the winter. The Shaden Tuft oak is in the Churchill Enclosure and will be over 300 yrs old .

The two final oaks we looked at are in this same enclosure - not far from Churchill Lodge. Parking is on the road towards Park End. We stopped first to see KING CHARLES 2ND OAK Grid Ref 625088 - an enormous Sessile oak with large limbs fallen all about it . The height is given as 80ft. The girth between 19-20ft. Aged over 300 yrs. King Charles 2nd was on the throne from 1660 to 1685. During his reign the wholesale felling of trees for charcoal was stopped. In 1668 a new law “The Dean Forest (reafforestation) Act” ordered the sowing and planting of the cleared woodlands. Plantations were to be kept fenced to protect young trees from being eaten by deer owned by the Crown, with sheep, cattle and goats owned by the Forest Commoners. The Iron works were closed and all young trees had to be conserved. It is considered that the King Charles Oak is one of these.

As also is our last tree visited THE FOREST GIANT - hidden away in a large conifer forest. I did mention that 100 yards down a track is a Redwood Plantation of *Sequoia sempervirens* - the Coast Redwood. This Grove was planted in 1938. Many of the trees are now over 100ft tall. Some are approaching 10ft in girth and will grow much thicker. In the wild these trees in California live for over 1000 years and can reach 300ft. It is said that the Boar have adopted some of this grove as their home.

The last tree –THE FOREST GIANT (see cover photo Ed) grid ref. 626085 is 60 ft high and a girth of about 19ft. Not so tall as it could be - due to the poor soil which is better suited to conifer growth. The dome of the crown is very striking when in leaf. Once again the tree has been pollarded about 15

ft up and four limbs allowed to grow on.”



Tintern Spurge

Whilst the trip had concentrated on mighty oaks we did stumble across Tintern Spurge, common name Upright Spurge (*Euphorbia stricta* or *Euphorbia serrulata*) pointed out to us by Mark Kitchen. This is widespread in Europe but uncommon in the UK, except around Gloucester. Our thanks to Tony for another informative and engaging day.

Text Tony Titchen and Bruce McDonald
Photos by Bruce McDonald

COPY FOR SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER BY 17TH AUGUST 2010
Due to email problems this edition was late being printed and a couple of articles have had to be carried over to September's edition Ed.

A New Orchid for Coryton

In 2007 while on a reconnaissance trip for a CNS field meeting, Bruce McDonald found an unusual Orchid on Coryton Roundabout. At first this was thought to be a hybrid between a Common Spotted Orchid and Pyramidal Orchid. However, last year I showed a photograph of the plant to Roy Bailey-Wood, who immediately suggested it was Common Spotted Orchid Var. *rhodochila*. I passed Roy's opinion on to

Bruce who made further enquiries and it has now been confirmed as this variety.



However, it may not be a first for Wales, as there was a possible sighting at Kenfig some years ago although this was never recorded. Nationally within the UK, it is uncommon; in fact its first recorded occurrence was in 1979 in Lincolnshire, and small colonies have subsequently been recorded from Sussex, Surrey, Nottinghamshire, Durham and Fife.

Common Spotted Orchid *Var. rhodochila*

Coryton Roundabout is proving to be a happy hunting ground for the CNS; it was also here that we found the first recorded specimen for Wales of the Long Winged Conehead.

Phill Blanning
Bruce McDonald
Roy Bailey-Wood