

CNS



CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY

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<http://www.cardiffnaturalists.org.uk>

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Cover: - Red Kite at Gigrin Farm by Raj Chettri

PRESIDENTIAL AMBLINGS

Working with other environmental groups

Every county is covered by a Local biodiversity Partnership. The intention is to link up a huge range of organisations that have an interest or statutory responsibility in protecting the biodiversity of the county. Historically we as a society have supported the Cardiff Partnership and I have recently joined the Vale Partnership helping to steer it over the next year. We have launched a competition for schools to encourage interest in wildlife. Although some entries were received for the 'Awards for Wildlife' there is scope for far more participation by children and students. It was a shame that no secondary school entered for instance. We aim to present the prizes at the Vale Show at Fonmon Castle on 21st August which is a wonderful event with a great deal of wildlife interest, as well as all the fun of the fair!

As another part of the effort to raise awareness of Biodiversity issues we are participating in the Wales Biodiversity Week [over ten days!] and spreading information about a range of local events. Events include a Nature Walk at East Aberthaw Nature Reserve on 14 June at 6.00 pm. The walk is led by Nigel Ajax Lewis of the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales.

A major effort is going into the Whole Partnership Awareness Raising Day on 4 July. Here all organisations associated with the Vale Partnership are invited to a daylong event this year based in the Aberthaw Power Station complex. The Partnership also receives advice regarding initiatives across the county.

Two notable instances are;

Local Wildlife Sites pilot project – creation of a grant to develop Welsh wildlife sites. Currently getting a bid together to fund a post that will develop the project to provide management advice to local landowners, linking into PONT and grazing strategies. There may also be the potential to provide small grants. Landowners who do not have the knowledge to manage the sites, would benefit if they had a contact for information.

Bioblitz at Rhoose Point coming up soon – the area is a former quarry site and the hope is that it can be turned in to an LNR. The aim of the bioblitz is to gather as much information as possible, there will be a number of groups attending, but it is also hoped that local people will be encouraged onto the site providing an opportunity to promote awareness. It is being run by the Vale Council with SEWBReC support.

Chris Franks

Field Meetings Summer 2013

Please check the blog for any late changes to the programme
Mobile on the day only 07847 560027

Saturday 8th June
Start time 10am

Taf Fechan
Half day

A joint trip with WTSWW to the Taf Fechan Nature Reserve, Merthyr Tydfil. Taf Fechan is a broadleaved woodland reserve running along a limestone river valley. The Wildlife Trust's warden, Carys Solman, will be showing us around. Meet at 10 am in the Lon Maes Du layby on Vaynor Road (<http://goo.gl/maps/XRS1L>). The visit will finish at 1pm.

Saturday 29th June
TBC

Rhoose Point
TBC

NEW EVENT. A Biodiversity Blitz organised by the Vale of Glamorgan Council ecology team to which Cardiff Naturalists' members are invited. We shall be trying to record as many species as possible in the company of some experts and local enthusiasts and residents. Check Cardiff Naturalists' website for details of start time, meeting place and duration.

Saturday 20th July
Start time 10am

Rhoose Point and East Aberthaw
Packed lunch

If you don't fancy the in depth look (or just fancy another visit) you can join us again at Rhoose Point and Aberthaw led by Rob and Linda Nottage. We will start by exploring the former industrial site at Rhoose Point, the most southerly headland of mainland Wales.



Habitats retained alongside the residential development include limestone grassland, cliff, scrub and quarry lakes. Moving on to East Aberthaw for the afternoon we can compare the wildlife of another man-made site with its woodland, lagoon and saltmarsh. Both sites support a range of flowers including Marsh Helleborine, and we'll look for dragonflies and butterflies.

Meet at Rhoose station car park over the level crossing at ST 062 662. We will re-convene at the car park opposite the Blue Anchor pub in E.Aberthaw after lunch.

Thursday 25th July
Start time 6.30pm

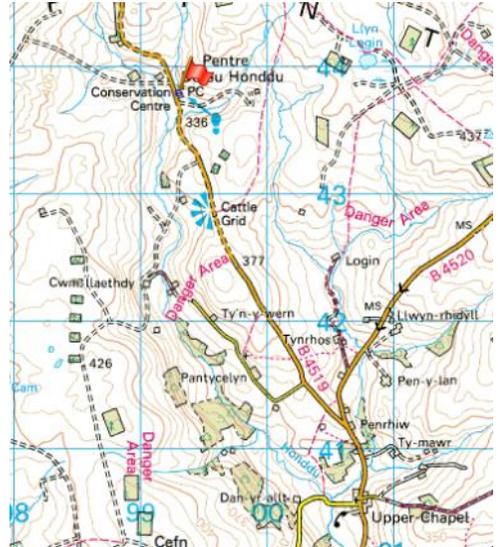
Hailey Park
Evening event

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. Duration about 1.5 hours.

Saturday 17th August
Start time 10am

Epynt
Packed lunch

On this walk, we will explore the geology and natural history of the eastern edge of the Epynt Ranges. We will look at the flood plains of ancient rivers and volcanic ash of Devonian age and evidence of shallow seas in the Silurian as well as evidence of recent glaciations. This is a circular walk with a couple of extra side stops, a total distance of approximately 5km. This area is a fairly exposed upland environment with some uneven footpaths so please come dressed appropriately. Toilets at the visitor center are usually open



Meet the Epynt Ranges Conservation Centre – Pentre Dolau Honddu (SN 99307 43788). Please bring a packed lunch.

Saturday 7th September
Start time 10am

Wenvoe
Packed lunch

This is a chance to see 4 new community orchards planted primarily to benefit wildlife at different locations in and around Wenvoe and St Lythans. Some are themed including an Elizabethan and a Welsh orchard and contain ponds and other wildlife features. Meet at the road junction in the middle of the village by the Village Hall (white building) at ST 1225/7293

FUTURE EVENTS

Sunday, 13th October – 11am start. Pontypool Park with Tony Titchen – details in next issue.

FIELD TRIP TO CEFN ONN PARK

Tony Titchen, Marion Kerslake and Bruce McDonald

An overcast but for the most part dry day saw us visit this popular north Cardiff park on Sunday, 21st April 2013i in the company of Tony Titchen. This is a beautiful park approximately half way between Cardiff and Caerphilly, consisting of a wooded hillside and a dingle which in spring is a riot of colour from Rhododendrons and Azaleas. For us the budding and general growth was very late following a very cold early spring so much of the vegetation that we would have expected to see in late April had yet to appear.

Tony's background summary follows:

The land used to be owned by a Mr Prosser who had, for many years, been the manager of the old Taff Vale Railway. Most of the original layout and planting was done by Mr T. M. Jenkins, a head gardener, who was in charge for 30 years. He started with Mr Prosser and later joined the Corporation of Cardiff. Prior to the 1914- 18 war and between the wars Mr Jenkins planted up the upper part of the Dingle with Rhododendrons, Azaleas, Magnolias and exotic trees.

A summer-house was built which was to be used by the son of Mr Prosser who suffered from tuberculosis for many years. Mr Prosser had planned to build a house nearby in an adjoining field but this was abandoned when his son died.

When Mr Prosser died in 1938 the property, consisting of 165 acres of dingle, golf-course and hillside land, passed to his nephew. He owned it through the war and in 1944 sold it to the Corporation via Alderman G. Williams for £7,000. Later, 40 acres were purchased at the top of the property from the Plymouth Estate, including two small fields at the bottom of the property to provide a car park and entrance from Cherry Orchard Road.



Some background from Tony

The park is divided into two by the Railway Approach Road with the southern planting not started until 1944. The upper section is laid out on the slopes of a small valley through which a tributary of the Nant Fawr flows. The pool is artificial and was made by damming the Nant Fawr tributary. A sluice gate is included in the dam.

There used to be a thatched hut nearby which was first intended for Mr Prosser to use as a changing room when he swam in the pool. Later it was used for the storage of tools.

The stream eventually flows down to Roath Lake as Roath Brook and later through Roath Mill and Waterloo Gardens and on into the River Rhymney. Golden Orfe fish used to be in this pool.

Marion Kerlake's thoughts on the day:

A fascinating and entertaining walk with Tony full of information about the trees we looked at and anecdotes about them. Did you know for example that a contributory factor to the start of the American War of Independence involved trees whose ancestors grow in Cefn Onn Park? George III insisted his royal crest be emblazoned on the trunks of all the tallest *Pinus strobus* trees in part of North America, claiming them as his property (for use as masts on fighting ships). Naturally this infuriated many locals and contributed towards war.

A Japanese emperor declared another 5 leaved pinus, *Chamaecyparis obtusa* (Hinoki pine) one of his five protected trees in Japan and death was the penalty for anyone caught felling one of these trees. Counting the number of leaves in each grouplet (fascicles) helps identify pines. The scent from crushed leaves is another useful aid to identification; we experienced the beautiful, pineapple scented crushed leaves of *Thuja plicata* (Western Red Cedar although it is actually a cypress).

A colleague of Tony's uses aroma to identify conifers and has different words to describe each species – just like a wine taster!! Conifer aromas can however, cause distress. When showing *Pinus lawsonii* (Lawson's pine) Tony said that when felled, its timber has such a long lasting, strong smell of turpentine that sailor's used to hate transporting it back to the UK. The bark of *Abies veitchii* with its characteristic dimples assists identification of this native of Japan



Abies veitchii

As we strolled through the park, we saw many tall, spindly magnolias with flowers only on their top sections, struggling upwards between other trees to reach the light. Tony explained that magnolias were among the earliest flowering plants, which evolved many million years ago, long before there were any bees, butterflies or moths. The only pollinators available were probably beetles. The number of tepals (no separate sepals and petals) per flower is an identification aid. We also saw evergreen (Sawara or false cypress) and *Picea omorita* (Siberian Spruce) with its distinctive cone.

Tony pointed out several *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* (Toffee tree). They are dioecious (male and female flowers are on separate plant), deciduous and have small paired leaves which smell of toffee in the autumn and I shall certainly return to them on the scent trail!

Tony reminded us that Cardiff has more rare/unusual/specimen trees than most parts of the UK and we should make the most of them.



***Picea omorita* cone**

More from Bruce

It is suggested that the name Cefn Onn means a 'ridge of ash trees' and it was supposedly the northern boundary of the Lordship of Cantre Breniol, one of the 12 lordships of Glamorgan. More recently the park has been host to Sudden Oak Death, *Phytophthora ramorum*, where in the USA it was associated with oaks where it would cause lesions. But it is also found on other plants and in Europe (and this applies to Cefn Onn) is linked to rhododendron and viburnum. Here it was first found in 2004 where 30 plants have been found to be infected, have been removed and re-planting has taken place or is planned.

A full tree list is held by Cardiff Naturalists' Society based on information supplied by Tony.

It was only possible to cover a proportion of these on the day but this included many of the more interesting ones. The Dawn Redwood, *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, pops up in a number of Cardiff's parks but was only discovered in 1941 and is very rare in the wild. It can appear superficially similar to the Swamp Cypress, *Taxodium distichum*, but a key feature that they differ on is that this has alternate shoots whereas the Dawn Redwood's are opposite – see photo.



***Picea omorita* cone**

Veitch's Fir (aka Veitch's Silver Fir), *Abies veitchii*, was first discovered in 1879 and originates in the Honshu area of Japan. It has distinctive bark, reminiscent of a reptilian eye and has purple-blue cones.

If you want to know more about trees in the company of an expert we plan to tour Pontypool Park on 13th October.

Photos by Howard and Sheila Sadd, Marion Kerslake, Mike Dean and Bruce McDonald

The list referred to has been placed on the blog as
XX

Leatherback Turtles in Trinidad **Phill Blanning & Linda Morris**

Last night we went to the beach, not any old beach but one with restricted access. It's the end of March 2013. The beach in question is in the village of Grande Riviere in Northern Trinidad. Why restricted access? Well this beach is one of the largest nesting beaches in the world for the endangered Leatherback Turtle.

We are driven by car from our remote orange painted hotel on the north coast on an unlit twisting road and in possession of the required permit. It is a dark warm Caribbean night with the promise of a full moon. We arrive at the Turtle Conservation and Education Centre whose rangers and volunteers manage this area of soft sand beach. From here we are quietly escorted by a ranger with several other permit holders down a lane and onto the beach.

All we can hear is the crashing surf as we head along the beach in a straggly line until we come to our target. She has already emerged from the sea and has excavated a hole, a metre deep in the sand.

We all watch spellbound as she begins to lay. She takes her time, oblivious to the human intruders all within touching distance as she performs the ritual perfected over millennia. Around eighty glistening white eggs the size of a snooker ball fall into the pit after which she goes into a trance like state and rests.



The full moon has emerged illuminating the spectacle taking place in front of us. Then she begins the seemingly laborious task of filling in the hole and disguising the nest site by spreading sand over a large circle using her back and side flippers.

The nesting season for Leatherback Turtles (LBT) begins in March and runs through until July/August, so there was some uncertainty as to whether the season had started when we visited. But we were in luck, in fact during the hour or so we were on the beach we saw at least 20 Turtles.



We had seen the LBT on display in the National Museum in Cardiff, the largest Leatherback ever recorded, but were still unprepared for the enormous size of these ancient creatures. Each one was at least 2 metres in length, just over a metre across the ‘shell’ and we were told weighed in the region of 900 kgs!



The energy expended by the female in hauling herself out of the sea, up the beach above the high water mark. excavating a hole, laying her eggs then refilling and returning to the sea must be enormous. But each individual will return up to 10 times in a season to repeat the whole process, and when one considers that at peak season there may be up to 500 animals on the beach at one time then the total number of eggs laid is astronomical.

However this beach is also used later in the year by both Hawksbill and Green Turtles so is obviously a very precious site that is being well protected by the government of Trinidad and Tobago.

It’s well known that the Leatherbacks travel great distances following their prime food of jellyfish. Indeed the specimen at the Museum in Cardiff was found unfortunately dead, in N.Wales. So as we watched our female on the beach we wondered if she had visited the seas of our homeland before returning to her place of birth where we now watched her completing a process that has been going on since the before age of the Dinosaurs.

Photo’s By Phill Blanning, Rabon David, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service & Coalición Pro CEN (used under creative commons licence from Wikimedia)

Mary Gillham
Andy Kendall

For those members not on the internet and email it is possible that you did not hear of Mary Gillham's passing Mary passed away at around 9:30 Saturday 24th March having been taken into hospital from the nursing home she had been in for the last few weeks

CNS were asked to represent local wildlife groups at the funeral because of her close relationship with the society, and some of us personally. I was asked to take on the duties and say thinking of inspiration one evening, until suddenly it came to me. I share this for those who were not there

Eulogy to Dr Mary Gillham
Delivered by Andy Kendall on behalf of Local Nature Societies

I, like Mary have had the honour of being the president of the Cardiff Naturalists' Society and am here to express our deepest respect and our fondness for her. Mary was not only one of the most illustrious members of the Cardiff Naturalist's', she was one of the most loved

And not just by us, I know that she was loved and respected by all of the local wildlife groups and organizations. Including, the Merthyr Naturalists, the Wildlife Trust, SEWBREC, the Cardiff Park Rangers, the staff from the institutions of the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff and Swansea Universities and of course the National Botanic Gardens of Wales where she was recently honoured as one of the top female botanists of Wales in an exhibition

She gave to us all in terms of knowledge, learning, and understanding, and shared enjoyment in discovery

When Mary was born in London town
She little knew she'd be renowned
For writing books and long-haul travel
Her life history I'll now unravel.

When war broke out and food was short
She volunteered to do her part
And though her work mates thought her barmy
She joined the Women's land Army.
She fed the stock and drove the plough
Monitored milk yields of the cow.

When war was over, tired of monotony
She went to 'Aber' to study Botany.
To write her thesis for her PhD

She chose Skokholm in the Irish Sea

To study the effects on plants of guano
Dear to her heart as we all know.
Worldwide postings came her way
She stayed a long time from the UK.

Five brave lassies of which she was one
Sailed to Antarctica, the first ever done.
Then Mary felt the call of home
Through Africa she did roam

She stopped at Robben Island on her way
Though with Mandela she couldn't stay
Back then in Wales she joined Extra Mural
And taught many students of all things rural

With an hour of chat plus one of slides
And field trips organized besides.
Aldabra called her when rumours rife
Said a US base site would cause there strife

To the endemic nature living there
Mary, when asked, listed all things rare.
President and Honoured by Cardiff Nats
On Merthyr's committee she also sat

A founder member of Glamorgan Trust
On all their deliberations she was a must.
She lectured still and also lead trips
From fungus forays and fun pond dips

She edited and illustrated our news letter
No one did these things better.
And in Mary's cottage on the Garth
There was always a welcome at her hearth.

In her garden filled with cats and flowers
She whiled away many long happy hours.
She drew and painted and wrote her books
She gardened, entertained and cooked.

There was no limit to her gifts
Through her life she calmly drifted.
With Mairead she travelled through sun and gales

Ate ostrich legs and crocodile tails

But both martyrs then to hips and knees
They cruise more gently on the seas.
So here we've gathered to celebrate
The life and times of our mate

To the end keen of brain, though weak of knee
The multitalented Mary G.

Some were also able to be with her at her 90th when we had a more intimate celebration where I presented a visual celebration of Mary. I simply entitled it

**Naturalist, Writer, Artist,
And above all
Friend**



Mary donated a large collection of books to the society which will be available to members for a donation at the beginning of indoor meetings in the coming season

CNS History coming out of the woodwork

I had a call recently from a chap who said he had “Magic Lantern Slides” relating to CNS early days

As he lives in Coychurch I said I would drop in after work so I did tonight and they are 2 boxes of 6x6 glass slides that relate to the early days of the society

Some are of pages from transactions and things, some are of people and some of wildlife events including the bird events Mary S wrote about recently. I think they look like a set someone did in the early 1900’s talking about the early days. Many past presidents are featured which will make an interesting story

Speaking to Steve Howe it turns out that he has an incomplete set of slides from Gilbert Shepard which Douglas Basset used in talks on the history of the museum so had transferred to 35mm slides

I plan to photograph them and put them on-line before we find a proper home for them in the longer term. That’s likely to be a winter project so watch out for an update

Wild about Cardiff

By the time you read this the event will be in full swing if not already done. Sorry, if that is the case, but as the world moves faster people assume that events can be organised in a very short about of time which is why it is really useful to have your email addresses on file

If you are reading this before the event then it’s at the **Wild about Cardiff event at Forest Farm Nature Reserve** on the 31st of May - 2nd of June

This event will feature walks led by Cardiff Naturalists and other groups, event’s for all the family and some plants and animals on show.

We will also have a large number of Wildlife books on-sale at knock down prices

More details here <http://cardiffnaturalists.blogspot.co.uk/2013/05/wild-about-cardiff.html>

Wales' Wonderful Wildlife

An exhibition of pictures of Welsh Wildlife and the environment by members of the Cardiff Naturalists Society at the West Wharf Gallery, Jacobs Building, Cardiff

Elizabeth Cooling our former membership secretary has offered CNS space in her exhibition gallery for a short period where we can display Wildlife pictures and information about the society

The work will include pictures of a wild range of our wildlife, environment, birds, plants, animals and geology, and will include some rarities that have been discovered by members of the society and on society events.

The show will run from the **1st – 8th June** and will be accompanied with some information about the society and why we think that's it's the best local wildlife group and one that is well worth joining if you have an interest in the environment. There will be an opening at 4pm on the 1st and hope to see many of you there. The gallery opening coincides with the building opening so it's open again on the 6th—8th June 10am - 5pm



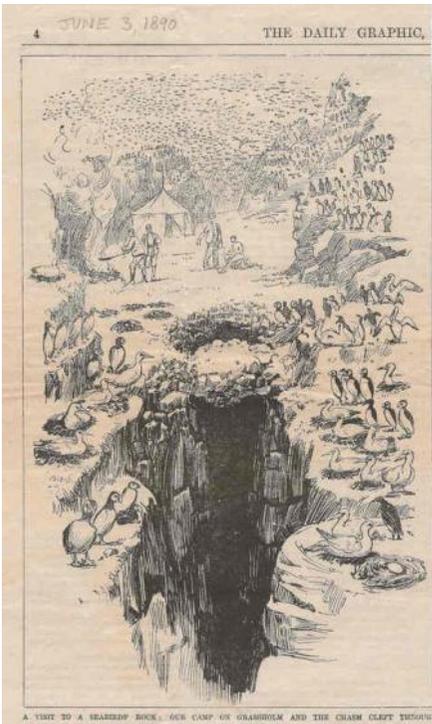
If it's a success we are already looking forward to having another such event

Jacobs Market is open Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Wednesdays by appointment only

This had to be arranged at short notice as it fitted with an opportunity for some space that Elizabeth was able to offer us between exhibitions so those of you who have given me an email already know about this and I can only apologise to those of you who are not getting our emails and remind you that the best way to make sure you do get them is to drop me an email to the usual information address info@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk

Deadline for next newsletter [15th August 2012](#)

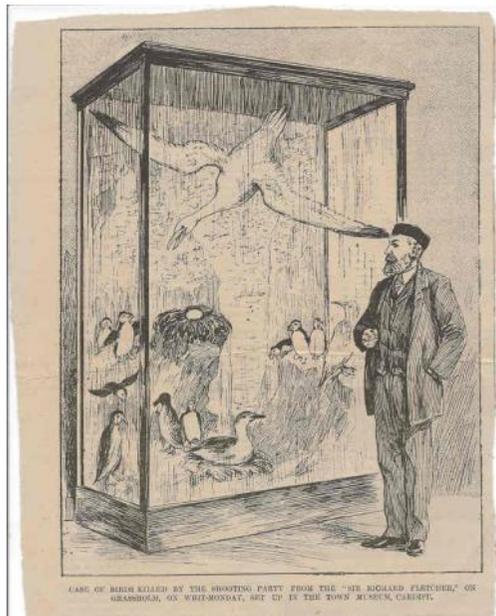
CNS, The Protection of Birds & The Mary Gillham Archive and collections



Last issue we brought you some information about the society history that Mary Salter had uncovered. In that article I noted that there were some interesting cartoons and we are able to bring you 2 of those here.

There are more and letters that we intend to scan and place on-line as an available archive for people to see and enjoy. This could become part of a much larger project because we also have quite a large number of Mary Gillham's archives which would make an excellent resource if properly treated

To that end the Society has already started discussions with SEWBREC and the Wildlife Trust both of whom have office space and the facilities to do such a project., and we are considering joining them in a lottery funding bid to scan and make available these resources. What we would need is volunteers as that adds up to a lot of money in a bid in terms of matched funding to time.



It is very early days, but if you think that you would like to be involved in such a project and would be able to offer some time in scanning and indexing such documents please let one of the council members know so we can bear you in mind. Take a look at the blog for more and bigger versions

Mary also gifted us her books. This gift consists of the many copies that she had of the books she published and also her collection of wildlife books.



We plan to make these available to members at the beginning of meetings in the coming indoor season as an incentive to come to meetings a little earlier and in the hope that we attract some more people to our excellent season of indoor meetings

At present most of what we have resides in our front room where Rhian is

valiantly working through sorting them into categories so we at least know what type of books we will bring to each meeting



This will be continuing as we have already had contact from three more people who mary left boxes of book with and we still do not know the total volume we'll be dealing with

We will vary the topic of books we bring each meeting and many will be offered on a “make a donation to a value you consider reasonable” basis. We have identified a few books that do have notable specific value such as the New Naturalist Series and we will place suggested donations on these

You may well see Mary’s own books and some general stories etc. at other events we’re at, but please be assured that’s us trying to reduce the bulk and by coming to the meetings you will get the pick of the best.

Council have agreed that any money raised will be put towards extending the Student prize fund as this is felt to be the most appropriate use of this money

Fos y Fran Andy Kendall

We had a wonderful morning up at Fos y Fran opencast site. The site is a major conservation success as well as being a working opencast, because it is the mining that is paying for the renovation of the old tip areas

It was arranged by Steve Howe, but on the day we had excellent leadership from the staff at the site, and fine transport being taken around in a fleet of Land Rover Defenders.

The basic plan of the sites development to make a big hole in the ground excavating topsoil, overburden and coal. This hole works its way East. At the end the last section of overburden goes back into the hole. In doing this they uncover many things of interest.



Some of these are old coal workings such as the pillar and stall workings to the left. In these can often be found old miners tools and coal drams and rails from the underground railways.



Other items being excavated are more recent history such as the old Aberfan tips (right) which were dug up and moved here after the Aberfan tragedy.



What we went to see were the beds of coal, and the beds of shale that contain fossil plants of upper Carboniferous age. About 306 million years old.

The coal beds whilst being plant material are so compressed you can't make anything useful out so it was the shale and sandstone layers that we were looking at. There are many types of fossil plants, but the most easy to find are the *Stigmaria* which are roots of the tree ferns that made up the forest. If you look in any of the student text books you



will see pictures of large roots with scars where rootlets were attached, but when you see a good quality specimen like the one shown you can see the rootlets as well.

Because the fossils are compressed they are not the best for collecting so for most of us the best tool for the day was a camera and in these pictures you will see a hammer used for scale. To give you an idea the hammer to the left is my large 2 ½ lb hammer so it's a big fossil.

As well as fossil plants we also found evidence of animals. I say evidence because these were not fossils of animals, but fossilised burrows. These are created when a burrow is filled with a slightly different sediment from the surrounding rock.



And then there are environmental features like the ripple marks to the left which are indicators of shallow water

And to top it off evidence for faulting in the rock. The picture below shows slickensides which is smeared crushed



rock. All in all a wonderful day out

There are many more pictures of this site on my photo website. You can find them at <http://www.shenstone.me.uk/galleries/geology/mudandcoal/index.html>



Kingfisher Forest Farm
Photographed by Paul Bowden

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