

## Meeting Report: Newcastleton

14-17 September 2014

**David Long** reports on a special BBS meeting to hunt for the elusive *Seligeria carniolica*

△Fig. 1. Members of the British Bryological Society at the *Seligeria carniolica* site on the Black Burn. D. Long.

Following the BBS autumn meeting in Edinburgh an additional meeting was arranged to enlist some help in trying to re-find *Seligeria carniolica* at the famous Black Burn near Newcastleton in Roxburghshire where it had not been seen at its only Scottish locality for 66 years. Evelyn M. Lobley (1902-1977) from Hexham in Northumberland was one of the leading British bryologists for over 40 years – see the obituary by Wallace & Smith (1982). Perhaps her greatest claim to fame was the discovery of a very rare moss new to Britain, the so-called Water Rock-bristle, *Trochobryum carniolicum* Breidl. & Beck (now *Seligeria carniolica* (Breidl. & Beck) Nyholm) in Scotland in 1948 and in England in 1964. The Scottish locality was on the Black

Burn near Newcastleton in Roxburghshire (v.-c. 80) and the English locality near Rothbury in South Northumberland (v.-c. 67), within the Northumberland National Park.

This elusive moss was first discovered in 1882 in northern Slovenia (then Carniola) and described in 1885. Since then it has been found in a mere handful of sites in Switzerland, Norway and Sweden in addition to the British sites. Its discovery in Britain was reported by Warburg (1949) but as the moss had only been detected some time after it was collected, there was always an element of doubt as to where she actually found it (Lobley, 1965; Long, 2015). Although it survives in small quantity in the Northumbrian site, at the Black Burn many



other bryologists including Evelyn, have failed to relocate it, in spite of two visits by the BBS in 1961 and 1976, and by Roderick Corner, Gordon Rothero and David Long in 1971, 1977 and 1996. Its extinction in Scotland was feared. Undaunted, ten BBS members, including our guest Kristian Hassel from Norway, assembled in Newcastleton on 14 September, for yet another crack at the mystery.

### 15 September

We made an important decision to search the lower reaches of the Black Burn from just above its confluence with the Liddel Water in Newcastleton, not just the higher reaches where Evelyn Lobley thought she had first gathered the *Seligeria*. Also, bearing in mind the habitat in Northumberland, we carefully searched the soft Carboniferous limestone bedrocks and boulders in and beside the stream. Astonishingly, we re-found the moss remarkably quickly, quite low down in the valley, close to Blackburn Farm at 140 m altitude. Fortunately, due to the dry weather, the water level was very low and it soon became apparent that the moss was abundant on rocks which most of the year would be submerged, and in places the plants bore the characteristic tiny trumpet-shaped capsules. This caused a scene of some jubilation in mid-stream for a time.

As we continued upstream we located several other colonies of the *Seligeria* in the same habitat, all in shade or partial shade of *Alnus* and *Fraxinus* trees, until we reached the tributary stream, Rough Gill, where there was no sign of the moss. However, our luck was 'in' as we managed to find several new vice county records for v.-c. 80 overlooked on the many earlier visits: *Scapania cuspiduligera* and *Platyhypnidium lusitanicum* (both new to the Southern Uplands of Scotland), as well as *Bryum gemmiferum*, *Bryum ruderales* and *Pohlia lutescens*.

### 16 September

The Hartsgarth Burn is another tributary of the Liddel Water about 4 km north of Newcastleton, almost a replica of the Black Burn in its geology and ecology, and in a repeat of the previous day *Seligeria carniolica* was duly found fairly quickly in the wooded lower reaches of the burn, in very similar shady habitats – the second Scottish and third British locality. A number of other noteworthy finds were also made during the day, most notably *Eremonotus myriocarpus* by Gordon, new to southern Scotland, along with *Hygrobiella laxifolia*, *Ulota drummondii* and *Hygrohypnum eugyrium*, all new to v.-c. 80.

### 17 September

On our third day we turned our attention

▽ Fig. 2. *Seligeria carniolica* with its trumpet-shaped capsules. R. Fisk.





◁Fig. 3 (left). Des, Liz and Kristian studying *Seligeria carniolica* in the Hartsgarth Burn. D. Long.

◁Fig. 4 (below). *Trichocolea tomentella* in the Tweeden Burn gorge. D. Long.



Border at Kershopefoot, where limestone boulders supported *Schistidium platyphyllum* and *Campylostelium saxicola* on the Roxburghshire side.

In conclusion, we felt that it is quite possible that *Seligeria carniolica* could be found in other valleys in Liddesdale where the same Lower Carboniferous limestone rocks outcrop. The localities in both Black and Hartsgarth Burns are close to, but just outside, the Langholm-Newcastleton Hills Special Area of Conservation, designated for its rare bird species. It is recommended that this be extended to take in the sites of this globally extremely rare moss.

#### Acknowledgments

George White, farmer at Hartsgarth, and Buccleuch Estates are thanked for permission to visit the Hartsgarth Burn and Black Burn, and Richard Fisk for the image of *Seligeria carniolica*.

#### References

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to the east side of Liddesdale, meeting at Dykecroft, where Des made a remarkable find of *Didymodon icmadophilus* in the car park, another very significant extension of range and new to southern Scotland. Our walk took us through conifer plantations into the wooded steep-sided valley of the Tweeden Burn, much damaged by forestry activities but still with some interesting bryophytes, particularly an oceanic element with *Colura calyptrifolia*, *Metzgeria consanguinea* and *Microlejeunea ulicina* on trees and a very fine flushed slope with *Trichocolea tomentella* and the large *Aneura* which is typical of damp woodlands. Our final stop was on the English