

# Reports of BBS meetings

Throughout the following accounts of BBS meetings, nomenclature follows Paton (1999), *The liverwort flora of the British Isles*, and Smith

(2004), *The moss flora of Britain and Ireland*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

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## Spring field meeting 2005, Ceredigion

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### Introduction

The headquarters for the meeting was the Plas Dolau Holiday Centre some three miles east of Aberystwyth on the west coast of Wales. There was some concern in advance about the dearth of single rooms at the centre, and several attendees chose to stay elsewhere in the area. In all other respects, however, the Centre proved to be a good choice: the accommodation was comfortable (split between a modern Swedish-style guest-house and an older mansion), food was well-prepared and provided in abundance, and the staff were friendly and helpful. It was especially useful that we were allowed to set up one room as a microscope lab for the duration, and given free access to a kitchen so that we were able to make as much tea as we wanted on return from a day in the field. Thanks to Pat, Jackie and Emily.

Forty-five people attended for at least part of the six-day meeting. Of these the following stayed at the HQ: John Blackburn, Sam Bosanquet, Des Callaghan, Rachel Carter, Diane Dobson, Lorna Fraser, Jonathan Graham, Jan Hendey, Ann Hill, Mark Hill, Liz Kungu, Mark Lawley, Graham Motley, Angela Newton, Mark Pool, Chris Preston, Jonathan Sleath, Sam

Thomas and Mike Walton. The following stayed elsewhere in the Aberystwyth area or attended just for the day: Jeff Bates, Tim Blackstock, Karl Crowther, Jeff Duckett, Joan Egan, Richard Fisk, Jean Hambley, Rita Holmes, David Holyoak, Richard Lansdown, David Long, Howard Matcham, Roy Perry, Ron Porley, Silvia Pressel, David Rycroft, Phillip Stanley and Sarah Stille. Sean Edwards and Ken Adams attended for business meetings only. Arthur Chater, Alan Hale, Joan James, Dave Reed and Richard Williams commuted from their homes locally. Nick Hodgetts was due to attend but unfortunately had broken ribs in an accident shortly before the meeting.

The sizeable party thus included three Marks, three Richards, two Jeffs, two Jonathans, two Davids and two Sams, who are therefore identified with a surname abbreviation when mentioned below.

Alan Hale as local secretary was responsible for organising the meeting, but is sure he would not have survived the experience sane without the help and support of Arthur Chater and Sam Bosanquet in developing and leading the field visit programme, and advice and reassurance from Mark Lawley.

### Wednesday 13 April

The sun shone as expectant bryologists arrived at Plas Dolau, in ones, twos, threes and fours, from mid-afternoon onward. Some took the opportunity to explore the grounds. After the evening meal, Alan gave a brief illustrated presentation on the bryological background of Ceredigion, including a summary of the geography and geology of the county and the history of bryological recording, together with mention of some notable sites, species and recorders. A preview of the site visits for the week ahead was also given – all of them in Ceredigion (corresponding to vice-county 46, Cardiganshire). Transport arrangements were made for the following day, and then most retired to bed or to the pub. There was some concern over Mark Hill who had been delayed but eventually arrived in the early hours of the next morning.

Jeff B had undertaken some recording in the area south-west of **Pumlumon** (SN78) earlier in the day and found *Anastrepta orcadensis* on a steep river bank, *Marchantia polymorpha* subsp. *ruderalis* in the lime-rich hearth of a ruin, and *Andreaea megistospora*\* on a riverside boulder.

### Thursday 14 April

Dave R and Richard W joined us for the day. Our first excursion was to the extensive abandoned lead mine in the valley of the Afon Ystwyth, upstream of **Cwmystwyth** (SN87C). This has been known as a site for *Ditrichum plumbicola* for several years, although only two patches had been recorded and one, adjacent to the road, was thought to have been destroyed by tipping. Sam B led the way up to the remaining colony and pointed out a few tufts of this charmingly petite moss, to varying reaction. The group then moved on eastwards along the valley towards Copper Hill. On the way there was discussion of the identity of the copious *Weissia controversa* on lead mine spoil by the track: all was thought to be var. *densifolia*, although only some

tufts were forming the hard moss-balls characteristic of the variety. A pleurocarpous moss covering the ground by a ruined building also caused debate but was eventually identified as *Brachythecium velutinum*, an uncommon plant in the vice-county. Three more colonies of *D. plumbicola* were spotted by Sam B, the last of them particularly luxuriant with plants up to 8 mm tall. Richard L found a few small tufts of the cupriphilous *Grimmia atrata* on rocks just above the road (only the second known Ceredigion site for the species), so we hoped that more would be found around the old copper workings on Copper Hill. *Racomitrium sudeticum* and *Tetraplodon mnioides* were noted by several people.

The old fieldwork maxim of ‘never be parted from your lunch’ was once again proven apt; Alan had rashly advised, as we approached the mine site, that people could leave their lunch, expecting that folk would return to their cars before going on to Copper Hill. This was not to be, since in the event the party moved relentlessly and seamlessly from the mine to the base of Copper Hill. At this point the group split. Most people climbed towards the Bronze Age copper workings on the side of the hill, where Arthur told them about the site’s history. Unfortunately, the vicinity of the workings was very dry and no *Grimmia atrata* could be found, although *Tetraplodon mnioides* was again present and *Ditrichum lineare* was noted on frost-heaved ground. Alan, meanwhile, having misinterpreted the location of the Bronze Age workings, had continued on and upwards and ended up at 19<sup>th</sup> century mines on the top of the hill where he waited expectantly but in vain for the main party. Eventually he was joined by David R and a few others but the only notable record here, from Jeff B, was of *Leptodontium flexifolium*\* (surprisingly, new to the vice-county). Jeff D, Silvia and Howard had worked northwards up the stream valley and Sam B followed a similar route, alone, spotting the distinctive ‘*acuminata*’ form of *Andreaea rupestris*, before climbing the slopes opposite Copper Hill.

When most participants congregated at the Bronze Age copper workings just after midday we realised that only a few people had taken Alan's advice to leave lunch in the cars. The obedient few therefore descended, leaving the majority to their food. The roadside *Ditrichum plumbicola* colony was relocated during the meal, much to Alan's pleasure (and that of Richard W who had first recorded the species at this spot in the early 1990s). Alan had finally returned just as the rest of the group were finishing their lunch and preparing to set off refreshed and ready for more fieldwork, and was obliged to eat his own sandwiches with undignified haste *en route*.

In the afternoon, most of the main group moved on to the **Hafod Estate** (SN77R). This large historic estate is extensively planted with conifers and beech but small areas of broadleaved trees and shrubs remain in steep sheltered rocky gullies. The lichen flora of the estate has been studied for many years by Ray Woods, but its bryophyte flora had received less attention. Ray guided people to the stream gully below Robbers' Cave, bypassing the sheer-sided Ystwyth gorge. *Heterocladium wulfsbergii* and *Platyhypnidium (Rhynchostegium) alopecuroides*, two pleurocarps that often grow together in mid Wales valleys, were locally frequent on rocks in the stream, with *Isotbecium holtii* also present in quantity. *Dicranodontium denudatum* was generally abundant on logs and tree bases, and rock outcrops on the sides of the valley held *Plagiochila spinulosa*. Muttered comments about lack of dedication to the bryological cause were heard when Sam B departed early to play 'Ultimate Frisbee' at Aberystwyth University.

Meanwhile, John, Mark L, Mark P and Richard F crossed the Ystwyth valley to the impressive and previously unexplored crag of **Graig Ddu** (SN87B). Here they made several noteworthy discoveries, including the second Cardiganshire record of *Leptobryum pyriforme*, *Gymnomitrium obtusum* and *Ditrichum zonatum* var. *scabrifolium* at their third sites in the vice-county, *Rhabdoweisia crenulata* at its fourth site, and the locally scarce

*Jungermannia atrovirens*. Jeff B, meanwhile, had independently located here *Andreaea alpina*, rare in the vice-county.

On the way back from Hafod, Alan, Arthur, Chris and Richard L stopped to check a clutch of willow in a small roadside quarry near Devil's Bridge for *Colura calyptrifolia*, and were rewarded with a considerable (if now rather predictable) amount of this attractive species. It was growing with *Cololejeunea minutissima*, still quite an uncommon plant this far inland in the county. They also admired a recently-discovered colony of *Ditrichum plumbicola* in the car park at Devil's Bridge, growing on lead mine spoil dumped (presumably as a weed inhibitor) on the edge above the road.

Sam T had been struggling to keep up all day and it came as little surprise when he was confirmed as ill upon our return to Plas Dolau. The diagnosis was a surprise though: mumps! This caused some concern for his well-being, especially since he was sleeping in a tent. The Plas Dolau staff were also worried because one of them was pregnant, and some mature male members of the BBS who had never had mumps were rather alarmed too. All in all it seemed best that Sam went home, and Mark H very kindly offered to drive him back home to north Wales that same night.

### Friday 15 April

**Cwm Doethie** (SN75L, M, Q and R) is a rocky valley in the hill country of south-east Ceredigion adjacent to the Mynydd Mallaen area of Carmarthenshire where numerous interesting bryophytes have been found in recent years. We gathered next to the youth hostel at Ty'n y Cornel and were met there by Graham. Despite there being a larger number of cars than anticipated, all parked in the youth hostel yard having negotiated the narrow road out of Llanddewi-brefi and the potholed track through the Cwm Brefi forestry plantation. With a party of around 20 bryologists available, Alan and Sam

B felt we should split into sub-groups to explore this bryologically unknown but potentially rich area.

A party comprising Howard, Sylvia, Ron, John, Jeff D, Mark L and David R struck off northwards along the Doethie Fach. They noted two stands of *Hamatocaulis vernicosus* in flushes, including a previously unknown one at Glog Fach on the west side of the valley. This species has proved to be widespread in the southern Cambrian Mountains in recent years, but remains rather local and unpredictable in its occurrence in the vice-county. More remarkable was Jeff's discovery of male plants of *Disclium nudum*\* on a clay river bank, the first record for west Wales. This was a convincing demonstration of the importance of knowing how to recognise suitable microhabitats for particular species.

The valley nearest Ty'n y Cornel was visited by Jean, Joan and Rita but nothing of note was found here.

Alan, Chris, Graham, Arthur, Richard L and Sam B explored the next valley to the south, at Craig Nant Iwrch. This held the base-rich rock that they had been hoping for, albeit in small quantity. A patch of *Plagiochila exigua*\* was mixed with *Amphidium mougeotii* and *Fissidens osmundoides* on a rock face on the south side of the gully, and *P. bifaria* was also present. Sam found *Marsupella sprucei*\* on a small stone above the stream and *M. funckii* on frost-heaved soil nearby. Many of the other standard Mynydd Mallaen humidity-demanders were also noted in this rich little gully.

David L, Liz, Mark P and Richard F climbed up the rocky valley on the north side of Foel Fraith. On their way up, Mark collected *Heterocladium wulfsbergii* and *Platyhypnidium alopecuroides* from the stream. Near the top, David made the amazing discovery of *Schistidium frigidum* var. *frigidum*\* on rocks and also collected *Andreaea mutabilis* nearby. The former is one of very few Welsh

records of this diminutive *Schistidium*, whilst the latter was only recorded new to Cardiganshire and mid Wales (at two sites) in 2004. *Sanionia uncinata*, another uncommon plant in the vice-county, was also noted in the valley.

Alan's party continued on southwards to the side valley below Pen y Gurnos. As they followed the Doethie downstream they found that it passed through a short gorge with a waterfall. Sam waded across to check the tall rock-face opposite and was rewarded with *Harpalejeunea molleri* (otherwise known in Ceredigion only from Cwm Rheidol), *Plagiochila bifaria*, *Platyhypnidium alopecuroides* and fruiting *Heterocladium wulfsbergii*. Slightly further downstream he noted a small tuft of *Polytrichum longisetum* on a gritty riverside tree base. Meanwhile, Graham found *Aulacomnium androgynum* on a tree stump, only the second vice-county record of this eastern plant. After these excitements, the side valley proved disappointing due to its shallow sides, and held little of note.

Meanwhile, Ann, Diane, Lorna, Rachel and Mark H took on the long walk up Nant Cnwchgwyn and across Esgair Gwair on the west side of Cwm Doethie. The terrain was *Molinia*-dominated and difficult and the group's dedication was unfortunately not rewarded with any good base-rich rock. They found flushes with *Fissidens osmundoides*, *Scorpidium (Drepanocladus) revolvens* and *S. scorpioides* and noted a little *Barbilophozia barbata*, the last of these a relatively uncommon plant in the vice-county.

### Saturday 16 April

Most members braved the elements for the long walk into Cwm Gwerin (see Figure 1), a bryologically unknown part of the rich north side of Pumlumon, the highest mountain in mid Wales. The original plan had been to start with Cwm Gwerin and then do a circuit round the summit ridge of Pumlumon; however, Cwm

Gwerin in itself proved more than sufficiently demanding.

There was a lengthy but sociable walk along the Afon Hengwm before recording started on acid rocks near **Pantau'r Bwryn** (SN78Z). Despite a thorough survey, nothing of note was recorded here. The party continued on north-eastwards for a short distance and then turned south-east into **Cwm Gwerin** (SN88E). The rocks at Llest y Graig were thoroughly explored but little of interest was found other than *Racomitrium sudeticum*. Lunch was taken in a bitterly cold wind, enhanced by a few flurries of snow. There followed a long trek across a *Molinia*-dominated bryophyte desert (with more snow, though not enough to be concerned about) to the impressive rock formation of Craig y March at the end of the valley. Here, there were some basic seepages (marked by *Neckera crispa*, *Tortella tortuosa*, etc.), and *Gymnomitrium obtusum*, which had proved elusive during the day, was finally turned up by David L.

Sam B split from the main group early on and recorded on the north-facing crags above **Maesnant** (SN78U), where he noted *Leptodontium flexifolium*, before descending to the Afon Hengwm to search (unsuccessfully) for *Discelium nudum*. The scant pickings on the river banks and the easternmost bay of Nant-y-moch Reservoir included *Pohlia bulbifera*. He returned to Plas Dolau for a meeting in the early afternoon.

Jeff D, Silvia and Howard also started in the Maesnant area and climbed south-eastwards up the stream towards the summit. Howard turned back after lunch, but Silvia and Jeff decided that they needed a character-building exercise and so continued on over the top of Pumlumon (despite the blizzard), admiring the abundance of Alpine-clubmoss (*Diphasiastrum alpinum*) up there. They then dropped down into the cwm of **Llyn Llygad Rheidol** (known to be the richest area of the mountain) and were rewarded by lots of *Anthelia julacea* and a little *Hygrobiella laxifolia*

on wet rocks, with *Nardia compressa* and *Scapania uliginosa* in flushes below. However, they were most impressed by the prolific gemmiferous protonemata on colonies of *Oreoweisia (Cynodontium) bruntonii* in the cwm, the first time they had seen gemmae on this species in Britain.

Other members visited the dune system at **Ynyslas** (SN69B and C) in the morning. There they paid their respects to fruiting *Petalophyllum ralfsii* and the small colony of *Bryum marratii* that clings on to existence in a carpark. The latter was looking rather sorry for itself and it was suggested that some measures to protect it from traffic would almost certainly allow it to spread. *Moerckia hibernica*, at its only Ceredigion site, was confirmed present in a dune slack by Ron Porley. Unfortunately the other target, *Bryum dyffrynense*, which grows on dune systems further north on the Welsh coast, appears to be absent from Ynyslas.

### Sunday 17 April

Sunday's visit to the MoD/QinetiQ missile-testing range at **Aberporth** (SN25G and L) had been prearranged by Arthur and Alan as there is very limited access to this sensitive site and security checks had to be carried out for each member visiting. The vascular flora of the range is extremely rich but its bryophyte flora was virtually unknown, so it looked a prime target for a BBS visit. On arrival we were greeted by Chris Shipton and other members of QinetiQ staff, together with volunteers from the QinetiQ/MoD Aberporth Conservation Group, who had all very kindly volunteered to give up their Sunday to escort us around the site. The range staff took our cameras into custody for reasons of security, but a range camera was allocated to the group in case we needed to take any photos (as it turned out, the weather was not conducive to photography and perhaps the only photo taken during the day was of the group at lunch). We were also given a very thorough health and safety briefing: the risks associated with visiting such a steep, exposed coastal area

were described in fascinating detail and we began to wonder whether a visit to this site really was such a good idea. Fortunately, the risk of attack by bees and wasps seemed low given the torrential rain that had already soaked us all on the short walk between the cars and the briefing building.

The rain abated as we walked out towards the coast and had stopped by the time we reached the wooded undercliffs that were our first target site. However, a strong wind off the land remained with us all day and sapped our energy. The range staff only let a few people descend, for safety reasons, and kept a watchful eye on us throughout, for which we were thankful. Sam, Ron, Tim and Mark L explored the slopes, noting *Frullania teneriffae*, a little *Plagiochila bifaria* and *Coscinodon cribrosus*. Sam also collected *Weissia perssonii* from rock crevices. The rest of the group were restricted to the cliff-tops, where *Campylium protensum* (*C. stellatum* var. *protensum*) grew in a small fen, *Bryum pallescens* and *Weissia controversa* var. *densifolia* lurked under a metal fence, and *W. brachycarpa* var. *obliqua* was found on a bank. Tim wandered off to explore on his own for a while, and there was a brief concern he may have fallen off the cliff, but after a flurry of activity the patient range staff returned him to us just in time for lunch.

After lunch in an old quarry the group split into three, with one party exploring a gully where Spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*) is abundant, most others descending a seemingly endless series of concrete steps (539 in total) to the beach, and Alan and Mark H exploring for bryophytes among stunted cliff-top oaks. The gully group noted *Amphidium mougeotii* and *Rhynchostegiella pumila* (*Eurhynchium pumilum*), as well as a few patches of Killarney Fern (*Trichomanes speciosum*) gametophyte. They then checked a damp gravelly track where a non-fruiting *Fossombronia* and quite a lot of *Archidium alternifolium* grew. The descent of the steps revealed more *Frullania teneriffae* and *Coscinodon* and, more unusually, *Anthoceros punctatus*\* growing on damp soil

overlying rock. *Bryum donianum* was also found. *Didymodon nicholsonii*\* was collected from a tarmac road on the way back to the buildings for a debrief and a few other ruderal species were added to the card. We expressed our gratitude to the QinetiQ staff who had so patiently escorted us around the site.

### Monday 18 April

Monday dawned wet, causing Sam B and Ron to cancel their proposed *Grimmia alpestris* expedition to Cadair Idris. Instead, Sam joined the main group at the rendezvous near the top of Bryn Bras; Richard W and Dave also arrived for the day. Before we set off, Jeff B ran through a list of likely additions to the 5-km square list he had for SN77NW, helping to focus dampened minds on the task in hand. As the main party trudged off towards Cwm Rheidol, Roy and Phil departed for a nearby lead mine, and Jan remained near the carpark to search for the ruderal mosses that Jeff had mentioned.

The wooded valley of Cwm Rheidol upstream of Parson's Bridge provided shelter from the worst of the rain, which cleared anyway by mid morning. Alan and Arthur led most of the party anticlockwise around **Bryn Bras** (SN77P) along one of Arthur's favourite routes, hoping to revisit the *Plagiochila atlantica*, *Andreaea mutabilis* and *Sphagnum skyense* that Sam had found there the previous winter. Meanwhile Sam led a group of hardy souls (Chris, Des, Tim, Jonathan S, Mark L and Mark P) along the opposite side of the river across steep wooded slopes that were bryologically unknown. Dave relocated the *P. atlantica* (see Figure 2) by following waded directions from Sam across the river. The rest of the group then gathered around to pay their respects and photograph this, the most southerly known British colony. Comparisons were made between *P. atlantica* and the locally abundant *P. spinulosa*, whilst *Lepidozia cupressina*, *Neckera crispa* and *P. bifaria* were located nearby. David R then spent most of the rest of the day searching for further *P. atlantica* colonies nearby, unfortunately

without success. After lunch, Alan and Arthur led the group onwards around the loop, but somehow became separated so only they (and later Mark L) reached the *Sphagnum skyense* site. There was an abundance of the similar-looking red *S. quinquefarium* and some material was closely examined but none turned out to be *S. skyense*. A different *Sphagnum* provided the highlight of the day for the remainder of the group, who had climbed up towards the top of Bryn Bras: Mark L (who had rejoined the group having collected *Plagiochila bifaria*, *Porella arboris-vitae*\*, *Scapania umbrosa* and *Heterocladium wulfsbergii* from the south side of the river) found *S. molle*\* on the edge of a basin mire.

Meanwhile, the intrepid explorers across the river in **Cwm Rheidol** (SN77P) found locally plentiful *Lepidozia cupressina* (see Figure 3) on decaying logs and oak trunks, abundant *Bazzania trilobata*, *L. pearsonii* and *Plagiochila spinulosa*, and frequent *Dicranodontium denudatum* on north-facing slopes, and a little *Anastrepta orcadensis* growing amongst other bryophytes. To the amazement of the main party they descended apparently sheer cliffs to a lunch spot by the river and then disappeared upwards on an equally steep route. Further clambering brought them to a series of rock faces above the river where *Anastrophyllum minutum*, *Metzgeria conjugata*, *Porella arboris-vitae* and *Neckera crispa* were noted in small quantity. No stunning discoveries were made among the more than 120 species they recorded, but there was a satisfying feeling that new ground was being broken. With the return time fast approaching, they hurried back across the river to see the *Plagiochila atlantica*. It was heartening (although not surprising given how careful about collecting BBS members now are) to see that the colony looked totally undisturbed, with only the trampled soil below its crag indicating the audience that had gathered there earlier.

## Tuesday 19 April

A smaller group gathered in the farmyard at Ty'nbwllch for the final visit of the meeting to the **Penderi coast** (SN57L). They began recording in the hanging oak woods of Penderi local nature reserve but these proved to be very dry and bryophyte-poor, with fewer than 15 species noted in total. The valley to the south was richer, holding abundant *Plagiochila bifaria* on north-facing slopes and frequent *Tortula viridifolia* on south-facing soil. Mark L and Mark P scrambled down the damp rocky bottom of the valley to the beach using a worryingly frayed rope, returning with *Eucladium verticillatum* and *Tortella flavovirens* for the card as well as *Weissia perssonii* for later determination.

Further south along the coast Sam B pointed out a small fruiting colony of *Coscinodon cribrosus* on shaley rocks at the top of a steep cove. This was the first time *Coscinodon* had been found fruiting in west Wales despite there being more than 20 known colonies in the area. More *Plagiochila bifaria* was noted, *Frullania fragilifolia* was locally frequent, and a little fruiting *Bartramia pomiformis* made an unusual (for Ceredigion) coastal appearance.

Most people left at lunch time so the remaining select party of Arthur, Alan, Rachel and Mark P rounded off the day in a valley slightly further down the coast, where they explored two streams running down towards the coast. The epiphytes were again largely limited to *Frullania tamarisci* and *Ulota phyllantha* even though Mark bravely fought his way through a gorse patch to search some willows beside one of the streams.

After a long and weary trek back we reached the cars just before the rain began, with a clap of thunder which seemed like a round of applause.



**Figure 1.** Cwm Gwerin. Photo: Jonathan Sleath.



**Figure 2.** *Plagiochla atlantica* at Bryn Bras. Photo: Jonathan Sleath.

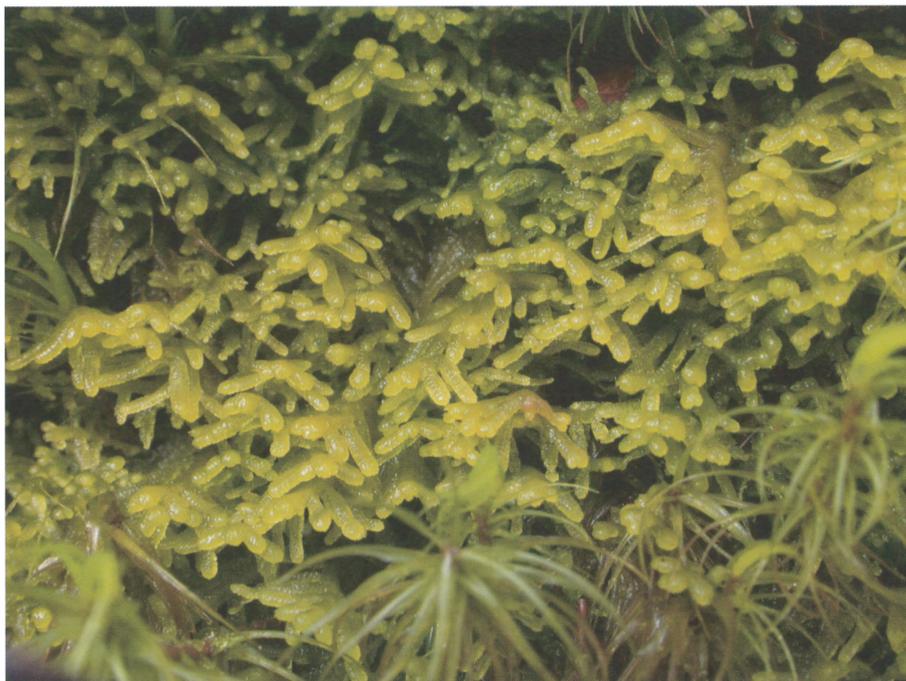


Figure 3. *Lepidozia cypressina* in Cwm Rheidol. Photo: Jonathan Sleath.

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# Reports of local meetings

## South-East Group

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### **Ranscombe Farm, Cuxton and chalk pit, North Halling (v.-c. 16), 14 November 2004**

This excursion was led by Jeff Duckett. In the morning, the group explored Ranscombe Farm, on the south-facing chalk slope of the North Downs. Ranscombe is known to botanists as a site where (by arrangement with Plantlife) one field has not been treated with weed-killer and has a rich flowering plant flora. Several years ago this field was deep-ploughed. Presumably as a

result, buried seeds of Corncockle (*Agrostemma githago*) were brought to the surface and in 2004 some hundreds of them flowered and seeded profusely. Hanbury and Marshall in 1899 comment that Corncockle 'could be found in every district' but it is now rare; Philp (1982) in the *Atlas of the Kent Flora* reported that the plant had not been seen in Kent since 1946.

It was in high expectation of bryophyte glories that the group descended on the Corncockle