

One member arrived and together we set off through the new streets, St Anne's Square - Spring Beauty in one of the plant displays - saw a bank of coltsfoot blooming near the new footbridge over the River Irwell and from Bridge Street went down to the river path. Flowers were just emerging and we tested our rusty (after the winter) knowledge for the names. There was a pale green ribbon-like plant under the water near to Ralli Quay, a large fig tree on the Salford bank and some *Marchantia polymorpha* liverwort on the riverside stone under one of the bridges.

At Castlefield, more of the liverwort was found, and the paving was blooming with Shepherd's Purse and *Erophila verna*. New buildings are obliterating the past, but there was plenty of industrial archaeology along the whole walk.

Bolton and Bury Canal and Withins Reservoir**H & J Lowell****22nd April 2000**

Twelve members met at Radcliffe metro station. We went N to the canal, seeing great and long-tailed tits, and crossed to the new track up the old railway. Temporary pools there had water boatmen and water spiders and there were huge clusters of a blue-green leaf beetle feeding on *Epilobium*. The ground around the planted bushes had presumably been treated with weedkiller: there were weird dandelions and we were unsure about the exact identity of several other weeds.

In the street leading to Radcliffe cemetery the sycamores were covered in lichen, one tree having no less than six different species. We looked at the ponds to the NW of the cemetery, finding *Ranuncula omiophyllous* and a sedge, which might have been *Carex rostrata*, but nobody was prepared to identify it.

We had lunch at Withins reservoir, watching a pair of Crested Grebes. Shortly afterwards on Elton reservoir we saw another 19 of the same species and also a black tern, undoubtedly the highlight of the day. Heavy rain meant fewer sightings on the way back via the Canal but we did see a fine display of *Ranunculus peltatus* in the mire SW of the old Hospital.

Priestcliffe Lees Nature Reserve**Priscilla Tolfree****6th May 2000**

Six members met up at Taddington on a gloriously sunny morning. It was good to escape Manchester in the grip of an early heatwave. We were repeating the walk of 1993, a fortnight earlier. The full glory of the spring in Derbyshire unfolded itself before us. Only *Orchis mascula* (early purple orchid) seemed to be missing - but there it was, at the top of the hill, just coming into flower. All the old favourites were there - *Primula veris* (cowslip), *Saxifraga tridactylites* and *S. granulata* (rue-leaved and meadow saxifrage), *Viola lutea* (mountain pansy), *Erophila verna* (common whitlow grass), *Carex caryophylla* (spring sedge), *Trollius europaeus* (globeflower), *Valerianella locusta* (cornsalad), *Botrychium lunaria* (moonwort) to name but a few. A lingering memory is of an open slope covered in *Anemone nemorosa* (wood anemone). Sadly, the *Daphne mezereum*, seen last time, has disappeared.

As I write this, I am just about to attend the official opening by the Duchess of Devonshire of "Plantlife's" first Nature Reserve in Derbyshire at Deep Dale, only a couple of miles from Taddington. "Plantlife" is Britain's only national membership charity dedicated exclusively to conserving all forms of plant life. It is well deserving of all the support we can give. I am delighted they have acquired this dale, representative of such an important habitat.

Kersal - the Cliff**Margaret Brown****20th May 2000**

Kersal Vale was rather a pleasant surprise. The walk started in a very old built-up area but almost immediately we descended into beech woods and then along the River Irwell.

It was a pleasant sunny day and, despite there being only four of us, we found a good selection of about 80 common plants and many trees which had been planted, some of which puzzled us a little.

Scale insects were very abundant on a witch elm and fooled us into thinking they were fungi. For Margaret McCormick it was a nostalgic trip as she had once lived above the valley, which was then owned by the racecourse company, and was forbidden territory and could only be seen at a distance. For her it was like gaining access to a secret garden.

Norton Priory

Audrey Locksley 3rd June 2000

Meeting at the car park seven members first went to Big Wood, owned by the Woodland Trust. A well-defined path leads up to the Bridgewater Canal and then circles round through mostly broad-leaved trees with some old yews. As it was raining hard lunch was eaten in our cars.

The rain eased off about 1 p.m. and we enjoyed the sculpture trail round the Priory Garden, which dips down to a stream bordered by a magnificent display of *Primula*; also, many native aquatic plants were present. There were many winding paths and interesting trees and shrubs. The Priory ruins are clearly explained and we walked over most of the old walls, being amazed at the thick stone coffins, now home to mosses and lichens. The history of the Priory is explained inside the museum, with many details of the tile patterns used on the floors and, most entertaining, the requirements of men wishing to become monks - scroungers were to be avoided. A huge sandstone sculpture of St. Christopher, fairly undamaged for its age, is in its own special room with information.

While we were having a drink in the café the rain deluged down but after half an hour we decided to brave it and look round the walled garden. This must be magnificent on a sunny day - roses cascading down from arches, elecampane, vegetables, and fruit trees. One flower of *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* (spotted orchid) poked through a low formal bed. There is scope on the Priory site to encourage more native flowers to grow.

Lymm Dam Walk

Margaret McCormick June 17th 2000

After some initial confusion regarding the meeting point, we eventually numbered seven, including a visitor from Stockport, Len Worthington a contact of Alan Bamforth's, and David and Joyce Earl, who had travelled from Southport, which sorted out the botanical know-how, and I was grateful for that.

The ice-cream vendor was doing a brisk trade in the sizzling heat on the main road. Young boys tested their angling skills on the local roach and bream. The great crested grebes were there with their now well-grown young, and a kingfisher with brilliant azure blue wings flashed briefly along the opposite bank, whilst we picnicked for lunch. We saw a common sandpiper and looked at fungi on nearby logs. We even had a brown rat scurry past us; somehow in the sunshine it didn't seem a threat.

Making our way round the end of the dam, we marvelled at the elaborate bridge built in the 19th century, and the avenue of fine lombardy poplars leading to a mansion that was never to be built, the notion of an earlier Lord Leverhulme in expectation of Lymm becoming the heart of his industrial empire, and his family home. However, he reckoned without local opinion, and eventually his plans were realised, not in Lymm, but in Ellesmere Port where he created Port Sunlight!

The temperature rose even higher as the day wore on; despite the shade of the trees we all were wilting by mid-afternoon. We sank onto welcome benches at the next picnic area, and after feeding a

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confiding squirrel with the remains of my egg sandwiches, there was lively discussion regarding cute fluffy things versus tree rats. There were mutterings about a football match due on the box around tea-time, and the ice-cream cart was becoming more irresistible by the minute. We could contain ourselves no longer, and headed towards it. Lemon ice-lollies slaked our thirst, and as we returned to the car park, I reflected on the good fortune that made Lymm and Port Sunlight what they both are today!

Littleborough and Hollingworth Lake

Christine Walsh

July 1st 2000

Eight intrepid members set out despite a poor weather forecast from Littleborough quickly leaving the town centre and crossing the canal to the old mill lodges where we found bogbean, skullcap, water forget-me-not and white water-lily. The lane then followed the course of a small stream where we found lesser spearwort, bistort, wild iris, mimulus, yarrow, wood horsetail, marsh marigold and meadow cranesbill. Some of the grasses were identified, thanks to Doris, as wavyhair grass, reed canary grass, false oat grass and crested dog's tail.

The way then followed a footpath through fields where heath bedstraw, ragged robin, bush vetch, marsh bedstraw, woundwort, figwort, Dyers greenweed (badly infested by aphids), tormentil, selfheal, and meadow vetchling were noted. The lunch spot was a picnic area by a small pond, where willow warblers were singing, and among the plant life were meadowsweet and waterplantain, not yet in flower. Among birds identified were lapwing, chaffinch, robin, wren and some were lucky enough to see a sparrow hawk. Water avens was setting seed alongside the track to the visitor centre and a beautiful honeysuckle (garden variety) was much admired. Water crowfoot, birdsfoot trefoil, zigzag clover, pink purslane and herb robert were added to the tally and we all had a good view of a willow warbler catching insects in bushes by the road. A mystery plant, growing in a spring, was identified as a water starwort, but the very small size of the flowers made further classification difficult. Some rather ugly farm buildings were redeemed by a good show of biting stonecrop and the swallows chattering song gave a sound of summer to the very overcast day. The harebell known to have grown on the edge of a small quarry seems to have been over tipped with farm rubble. What a pity! One or two meadow browns were on the wing and a rather faded painted lady was resting on a bramble flower at Clegg Hall. The large tufts of badger hair on the track suggested some drama had occurred but no body was in evidence.

The final section of the walk along the canal yielded gipsywort, woody nightshade, perforate St Johnswort and to Margaret's delight-common spotted orchid. Oystercatchers were heard and seen overhead whilst a pair of tufted duck pottered on the canal. We were all very pleased to escape the heavy rain forecast and a light shower did not dampen our spirits as we returned to our start point.

Clayton Hall and Clayton Vale

Audrey Locksley

15th July 2000

St.Swithin's Day, but the rain kept off, though for July it was chilly. Clayton Hall was owned, after the Claytons by the Byrom family, and then was bought by Humphrey Cheetham. It passed into the ownership of Manchester Corporation in 1897. Hidden by trees, few people know this moated hall is just a few yards off Ashton New Road. Part is let off, and the other section is being improved by East Manchester Parks team, with a view to having it as a visitor centre. There was plenty of historical information displayed in the main room, and the layout of the garden was explained to us by two members of the team, who had kindly arranged for our visit.

Next we parked in Fairclough Street by Philip's Park, one of the first three parks opened in 1846, had our lunch, and then set off. Going under the arches of the old mineral railway we went up steps to the top, which has been planted and probably seeded. The path winds round to pass alongside the Guide Bridge line, and various ways can be taken to drop down through young woodland to the River

Medlock. A variety of flowers were in bloom and after a few searches in the long grass, orchids, probably hybrid, were found. Further along by the river, two flowers of spotted orchid were seen.

From the second bridge over the Medlock, we climbed up to the end of Vale Street, and walked along the higher path and the cobbled road to our starting spot. What is so amazing is the amount of growth of grass and trees since our first walk there, in August 1997. When Audrey Franks and I did that walk, we went to a wildflower meadow planted by North West Water. Many of the rather exotic species are still surviving, mainly at the edges: fodder burnet, ragged robin, bedstraw, meadow sweet, one corncockle, and agrimony. To escape from the fierce sun in 1997, Audrey and I had found a shady spot under some willow scrub for lunch. Determined to find the spot in what is now very dense willow, I found a way in. There on the ground were at least forty heads of Yellow Birds Nest (*Monotropa hypopitys*), which is quite uncommon in this part of South Lancashire. It does occur on the coastal dunes among creeping willow. An exciting end to a day out only three miles from the city centre.

Risley Moss

Margaret McCormick

26th August, 2000

Risley Moss is one of the remaining raised peat bogs that once were numerous along the Mersey Valley. Although most were drained for agriculture, Risley survived because it was considered too wet to be any use. Later, in the 1800s, vast amounts of peat were dug to supply the growing demands of the industrial revolution.

Fortunately, the wildlife value of the site was recognised in time, and is now designated a local nature reserve, and site of special scientific interest. There is an ongoing project to restore the sphagnum bog, and the oak and ash woodland areas provide a valuable habitat for many species of wildlife.

Although there were some spectacular sculptures to admire along the paths, this walk turned out to be somewhat disappointing as most of the flora was fading, and an earlier date would have proved more productive. There were reports from local birders that Marsh Harrier, Hobby, and Buzzard, were around, and though we scanned the mossland area from the observation tower with binoculars, there was nothing more interesting than a few sandmartins, swallows and magpies.

In desperation we moved on to the nearby Gorse Covert, an area that Audrey L had discovered on an earlier exploration. This was a managed public open space on the edge of a new housing complex, with a network of good paths linking a varied mix of habitats: woodland, and scrub grassland with ponds and hedgerows that yielded good sightings of butterflies, dragonflies, and damsels. It was hoped that, being a mossy area, something riveting would be revealed, but it just wasn't the day for it. However, the pathways were pleasant, the day fine, and the company good, so we settled for that and enjoyed the days walk.

Worthington Lakes, near Adlington, Lancs.

Doris Nash

23rd September 2000

Warm sunshine allowed 5 members and 2 guests to have a very leisurely 5-mile stroll in just over 5 hours.

A short cut through the disused Bleach Works yielded a sample of *Euphrasia* (Eyebright) for a botanist at Manchester Museum, and gave us our first bird-watching stop of the day to see Swans, Coot, Mallard and Water Hens on the works lodge. (Earlier, Maureen and Ron Davies had spotted a party of Long-tailed Tits near where they parked.)

Arriving at the car park for the Lancashire Cycle Way, which here follows an old mineral line, we found Silver-thread Moss (*Bryum argenteum*), *Hypericum tetrapterum* (Square-stalked St John's-wort) and several metres of *Potentilla reptans* (Creeping Cinquefoil). Other plants seen later in the day

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included *Ajuga reptans* (Bugle), *Angelica sylvestris* (Wild Angelica), *Glechoma hederacea* (Ground Ivy), *Glyceria maxima* (Great Water-grass), *Lycopus europaeus* (Gipsywort), *Myosotis scorpioides* (Water Forget-me-not), *Pilosella officinarum* (Mouse-ear Hawkweed), *Rumex sanguineus* (Wood Dock) and *Veronica beccabunga* (Brooklime), while *Lamium album* (White Dead-nettle), *Lonicera periclymenum* (honeysuckle) and *Silene dioica* (Red Champion) were still in flower.

The railway cutting is quite deep, with shallow ditches on either side. I have been told that it was made especially deep to hide the coal wagons (presumably horse-drawn at first), from the view of Arley Hall. Now it is made shadier with oaks, willows, sycamores, etc. to make an ideal habitat for ferns and mosses. The walls of the first bridge crossing it, had *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum* (Black Spleenwort), *A. ruta-muraria* (Wall-rue) and *A. trichomanes* (Maidenhair Spleenwort).

Next it is crossed by the Leeds and Liverpool Canal (completed 1816), and the high stone walls supporting this proved to be an important site for the calcareous Liverwort (*Pellia endiviifolia*), which benefits from water seeping on to the lime mortar. At this time of year it has an almost mossy appearance as it produces fern-like appendages, which are obviously very successful in colonising this friendly environment vegetatively. Later, the plants resume their normal liverwort image. Soon afterwards, another liverwort, *Marchantia polymorpha ssp polymorpha*, was found in a shallow pool beside the track. Usually this grows in streams in the hills. It is larger than the familiar 'plant pot' liverwort, (*Marchantia polymorpha ssp ruderalis*) and has a dark central vein.

Eventually, we forsook the track and passed through woodland to the canal bank, pausing to inspect a Violet Ground-beetle (with ticks) en route. We found a sunny resting place for lunch on the tow-path with our backs to the boundary wall of Arley Hall (now the club house for Wigan Golf Club).

Walking beside the canal in the afternoon, Swallows were sighted, and then four Mistle Thrushes (a fairly rare sight), in a field. The bird-feeders in a very attractive garden were alive with Blue Tits, Great Tits and Greenfinches. One of the latter had a pink beak - a sign, perhaps, of a mystery disease, which is afflicting the species.

The countryside we passed through on our way back to Arley Hall shows few signs of the coal-mining of earlier days, apart from a few capped mine-shafts. However, this year it has suffered another upheaval as a gas pipeline has burrowed under Wigan Lane, the River Douglas and the canal. Top-soil is heaped in the fields, footpaths have been closed, and all is mud and standing water.

Back at the Hall, we lingered to admire three Black Swans beside the well-kept moat. Then into Arley Woods, where there were traces of what is believed to have been a corn mill beside the River Douglas. A short walk brought us to the point where the river is culverted underground to avoid polluting the three reservoirs - Adlington, Arley and Worthington - and over a stile beside some brambles where Speckled Wood butterflies were in evidence. One remained stationary for some time as we inspected it, and then appeared to escort us from its territory. This species has come into its own in the area in the last couple of years. We had seen one at the start of our walk and one Red Admiral.

The day ended with more dedicated bird-watching - a pair of Ruddy Ducks with two juveniles, Grebe, Coot and a Jay at Adlington Lake and, at Worthington Lake, a disappointment for a troupe of Mallard expecting food, while a flotilla of Canada Geese remained disdainfully aloof on the water.

I am grateful to Edna Stephenson of the LBS for recommending the railway track; to Diana Downing for her detailed local knowledge and the gift of the attractive informative booklet "Naturally Chorley" produced by Chorley and District Natural History Society; and to John Lowell for his knowledge of bryophytes and the higher plants.

We were very fortunate to have a dry day in the midst of all the wet weather and 10 of us enjoyed a really fruitful fungus hunt, with the aid of Margaret McCormick and other keen eyed members.

We stuck to our usual route from the visitor centre to Black Lake, then to Barnsbridge Gates and back via Blakemere Moss where there were plenty of wildfowl including teal. Along the way there were plants to identify, such as wild strawberry, and birds, including long tailed tit, treecreeper and greater spotted woodpecker.

The fungi were there in abundance, we eventually identified 48 species; Margaret's joy at seeing her first death cap was lessened the next day, when the specimen was identified as false death cap, never mind! The most interesting were:

Amanita citrina (false death cap); *daedaleopsis confragosa* (blushing bracket); *amanita rubescens* (the blusher); *boletus badius* (bay bolete); *boletus edulis* (ceps); *bulgaria inquinans* (black bulgar); *calocera viscosa* (yellow staghorn fungus); *collibia butyracea* (buttercaps); *exidia glandulosa* (witches butter); *helvella crispa* (white saddle fungus); *helvella lacunosa* (black saddle fungus); *hypholoma elongatum* (sphagnum toadstool); *russula cyanoxantha* (the charcoal burner); *russula nigricans* (blackening russula); *lactarius turpis* (ugly milk cap); *stropharia aeruginosa* (verdigris toadstool); *tremella mesenterica* (yellow brain fungus); *collybia maculata* (spotted tough shank)

The two saddle fungi had a very bizarre appearance and the specimens were in good condition. Some unusual looking sulphur tuft turned out to be the rarer *gymnopilus penetrans*. The undoubted star of the walk, literally, was the earth star *geastrum triplex*, a fascinating species unlike any other-we found several groups of it.

Other fungi recorded include: -

<i>armillaria mellea</i>	honey fungus
<i>auricula judae</i>	jews ear
<i>coprinus atrimentarius</i>	common ink cap
<i>coprinus comatus</i>	shaggy ink-cap
<i>coprinus disseminata</i>	fairies bonnets
<i>coprinus plicatilis</i>	little umbrella toadstool
<i>crepidotus variabilis</i>	slipper toadstool
<i>daedaleopsis concentrica</i>	King Alfred's cakes
<i>ganoderma applanatum</i>	artists fungus
<i>hypholoma fasciculare</i>	sulphur tuft
<i>hypoxylon polymorpha</i>	dead mans fingers
<i>laccaria amethystea</i>	amethyst deceiver
<i>laccaria laccata</i>	the deceiver
<i>lactarius quietus</i>	oak milk cap
<i>lepista nuda</i>	wood blewits
<i>lyophyllum conatum</i>	no common name
<i>marasmius androsaceus</i>	horsehair toadstool
<i>marasmius rotula</i>	little wheel toadstool
<i>nectria cinnabarina</i>	coral spot
<i>paxillus involutus</i>	brown roll rim
<i>polyporus betulinus</i>	birch polypore
<i>psathyrella candoleana</i>	crumble tuft
<i>scleroderma citrina</i>	common earth ball
<i>stereum hirsutum</i>	hairy stereum
<i>suillus luteus</i>	slippery jack
<i>trametes versicolor</i>	zoned polypore
<i>tricholomopsis rutilans</i>	plums and custard
<i>xylaria hypoxylon</i>	candlesnuff

There were eight of us, including a welcome visiting fungi expert, John Taylor. The forecast promised heavy rain, which bucketed down at the start, and looked set in for the day. Undaunted we headed across the field to the wood, once a Victorian game reserve on Lord Stamford's, Dunham Hall estate. Now National Trust property, this little five acre wood is managed by the Cheshire Wildlife Trust. It consists mainly of Oak, Birch and Rowan with an understory of Hazel, Elder and Bramble; it supports a good population of fungi, and is home to wintering Woodcock, Goldcrest, and Siskin. Though we saw none of these, there was a flock of Long-tailed tits. Nesting summer visitors are Willow Warbler, Chiff-chaff and Blackcap along with residents like Coal, Great, and Blue tits and Great-spotted woodpecker.

Happily, the rain soon stopped and although most of the fungi was past it's best, John was soon making notes and stowing away specimens for microscopic examination later. I was able to show the group an unusual club fungus *Clavariadelphus fistulosum*, that Maurice Lees found whilst we were working in the wood a few weeks earlier.

We had begun to feel a little chilled with the slow pace through the wood so emerged on to the Trans Pennine Trail and headed west towards Heatley and Lymm for a brisk walk to warm us all up. Retracing our steps later, we were back at the car park by three o'clock, just as the rain started again.

Blackley Woods**Maureen & Ron Davies****31st July 1999**

(with apologies from the editor for omitting this piece in the last Report)

On the hottest day of the year so far, we led this ramble instead of Doris Tucker, because she was ill.

Only one member turned up, and we had a very pleasant walk in these leafy woods. We took the very steep right hand path, which brought us out on a grassy plateau overlooking a reservoir, which is used by fishermen, where we rested for a while.

Dragonflies, damselflies and meadow brown butterflies were plentiful. Our way continued downwards along another steep path, where the steps have been broken and worn away by motorbikes, which are ridden at great speeds and noise by youngsters, which is a shame. The paths along the river are pleasant, and lead to Victoria Avenue. We saw a group of young Mallard ducks, then a mother Mallard with 5 young ducks, so small they could not have been more than 2 days old. A rat was seen, and a Grey Wagtail. That was all we saw.

We could have extended the ramble over Victoria Avenue, and through another part of Blackley Woods, but decided to retrace our steps and finish early because of the heat. There are two picnic tables on the riverside, where we had lunch and it was very pleasant. These woods were planted in 1953 by Manchester Corporation, on what was originally a golf course owned by Sid Ball. Blackley Crematorium is also on this site.