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RETIRING PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Robert Sykes

(Presented before the AGM at NHM, London, 10 April 2010.)

It is one of the conventions of this Society that the retiring President addresses this general meeting. I confess that seems a little odd to me: do you want yesterday's man telling you about yesterday or tomorrow's woman talking about the future? But I was told very firmly by your officers that this is what I should do, so meekly I am doing it.

I cannot be intensely forward looking – it would not be right for me to tell the next President what to do – so I must either give a personal talk not necessarily related to my appointment (disasters in my garden; a proposed revision of the cultivar classification table, that sort of thing), or I could look back over the last three years in a triumphalist or apologetic or self-justificatory sort of way, or look at the present and deliver a sort of 'state of the union' address. It's that last option I will attempt. But I have not asked for very long to do it. And you are going to get less (or you may think more) than you expect, because I still think that the next President should have a slot on this important day – and she is getting my last ten minutes.

So – what is the state of our Society in 2010? What are our strengths and our weaknesses?

First, boringly some may think, but crucially for our good health, we are financially sound, thanks to careful housekeeping over the years down to the present. Gill will tell you about it this afternoon.

Secondly, we are a society of volunteers. We have no paid executive officer to hold our affairs together. Graham Ackers makes an invaluable contact list each year of people with some formal job or appointment in the Society – currently there are 40 names on it. None of them is a passenger; all of them are working crew. It is because of their talents and their



photo: courtesy R.W. Sykes

Robert Sykes in his fernhouse

commitment to our Society's well-being that our programmes and achievements are so much greater than one would expect from our numbers. There is an inner core – the President, the Secretary Yvonne Golding, the Committee Secretary Graham Ackers, the Treasurer Gill Smith. My gratitude to them is unbounded. Adrian Dyer referred to them as the A team when he passed me the baton, and so indeed they have proved.

Still on strengths: what else?

We publish four journals each year. Four journals for a membership of around 750! If you compare that with the output of huge societies like the RSPB or the National Trust, the enormity of it is apparent. Add to that our wide-ranging website, and the achievement is more extraordinary still.

We have an amazing programme of meetings – national, international, the local meetings run by our Regional Groups, indoor study meetings – all excellent opportunities to expand our personal knowledge, and contribute to the general knowledge base by recording, and invariably enjoyable social occasions as well.

Our Regional Groups – another strength. And thank you Brian Dockerill and Yvonne who recently started new Groups: South Wales and the Borders, and Manchester and North Midlands.

We started in 1891 as an amateur society, but we would be of little account if we were not anchored by our professional members, and I believe the professional/amateur interaction is one of our great strengths – it is certainly very rewarding for us amateurs.

There is a wealth of horticultural experience among our members. The most common way of sharing that knowledge is by direct discussion, often on garden visits. There are two new ways that Anthony Pigott has set up for us: one is the BPS Fern Forum, which is just that – a forum for exploring ferny questions, and deserves to be used more fully; Google fern forum or go to www.fernforum.net/bb/. The other is the proposed register of ferns in members' gardens, which I will come back to later on.

We have an outstanding spore exchange and I am sure some people join just to have access to it. It had been run for a good many years by Anne and Barry Wright; it was not easy to find a successor, so I was particularly grateful to Matt Busby for taking it on.

That is a glance at some of our strengths: what of our weaknesses? Well it seems to me that we have only one significant weakness, and I have referred to it obliquely already: we would be stronger and more secure if we had more members. It would give us a sounder financial base, it would give us a deeper pool in which to fish for volunteers for our many activities, and of course, most important of all, it would help fulfil what we are here for in the first place, to encourage enthusiasm for ferns. We have addressed that as best we can: we had a stand at Tatton, which recruited several new members. That was mistress-minded by Yvonne Golding and was very successful. She also ran a fern day at Manchester Museum, which was well received. We have a new education officer, Alison Evans; she and the small group working with her are looking at the opportunities both for our existing members and for potential recruits. I think those are the sort of initiatives that are most likely to lead to new membership applications. You can help too: the dream scenario is that every member recruits one new member; somehow that remains a dream, but please never ever miss an opportunity to extol the joys of membership of this very novice-friendly society and to give out a membership form – you can get it off the web if you do not have one in your pocket. And we do need a marketing and publicity officer. Alison's education subcommittee is covering some of the ground, but it would be good to pull that area of our activities together, and if there is anyone here or whom you know who might be interested in tackling some aspect then do please let me or one of us know.

I heard a whisper that we were showing some kind of northern bias. Last two presidents from Glasgow and Edinburgh, this one from Kendal, next from Edinburgh again. We have supported the restoration of the Benmore fernery, and are looking to offer some support to Arduaine, both in Scotland. We are financially supporting a list of great Scottish gardens with ferns in, we underwrote the stand at Tatton and the fern day at Manchester Museum. A persuasive case? Not really. We are keen to support any initiative anywhere that contributes to fern knowledge or encourages enthusiasm or benefits the Society in some way. As chance would have it several initiatives have been in the North. If you put on a fern day in a museum in Southampton, or set up a stall at Chelsea or Hampton Court, or have other more exciting southron ideas, I have no doubt you will find the Society is excited and supportive.

On a personal note, like the gondoliers, it has been a privilege and pleasure that I treasured beyond measure, being the President of the British Pteridological Society. Thank you. Unfortunately it has been a difficult time for me domestically – my wife is not well – so I am afraid I have not given the Society as much time as I would have liked. For example, one project that did not happen: I had hoped I might do a series of tours round the country visiting members' gardens, but sadly it was just not possible. That would have been a lot of fun for me, and I think it might have been useful for the Society to have an overview of what we are all doing. There are some wonderful collections and a huge skill-base that I believe is not as well known as it should be. It is with that same thought in mind that I suggested that it would be fascinating and useful if members were – voluntarily of course – to list the ferns they are growing, and if those lists were available within the Society. Sounds simple, but becomes more difficult when you start analysing it. Roger Golding and Anthony Pigott have been giving a lot of thought to the best database medium. It is just getting past the twinkle-in-the-eye stage and is being demonstrated today for you to look at. I hope that will prove to be a useful and enjoyable tool.

NATIONAL FIELD MEETINGS

VIDAUBAN, VAR, SOUTH-EAST FRANCE – 2-5 February

Tuesday 2nd – Nice to Vidauban

Pat Acock

Paul Ripley and I flew into Nice airport to meet up with Sébastien Sant. We picked up the car and were out in the field in no time at all. The area was experiencing the coldest times for a generation, with snow on the hills above Nice and lying on the verges around the town, the overnight temperature having fallen to -8°C. Our first stop was just east of Saint-Jean de Canne (43°31'27.1"N, 6°53'4.5"E). In this beautiful *Quercus ilex* / *Q. suber* heathland we had lunch whilst appreciating how devastating the recent summer fires must have been and how difficult it will be to remove the alien eucalypts and acacias that have invaded this coastal Mediterranean vegetation.

Driving on to a site just south-west of Saint-Jean de-l'Esterel (43°30'38.3"N, 6°49'46.7"E) we met Denis Gynouvès, Chef de District Forestier Principal, who was to accompany us for the next two and a half days. Denis led us up a stream in mixed oak woodland where we encountered *Peridium aquilinum*, *Asplenium onopteris*, *Polystichum setiferum*, *P. aculeatum*, *Dryopteris affinis*, *D. cambrensis* and *D. filix-mas*. *Blechnum spicant*, which is scarce in the region and *Osmunda regalis*, increasingly common in the area, were also seen.

Close to sunset we parked further on at a pull-in at another very special Var habitat – sandy heathland dotted with slabs of siliceous Permian sandstone known locally as dolles de grés – at Le Bois de Rouquan (43°21'32.4"N, 6°26'29.4"E). On this flat plain of pink sedimentary rock we saw *Asplenium trichomanes*, *A. ceterach*, *A. septentrionale*, *A. onopteris*, *A. obovatum* subsp. *lanceolatum*, *Anogramma leptophylla*, *Ophioglossum lusitanicum* and *Selaginella*

dentata. *Isoetes duriei* was seen in shallow ponds in the rock. As the sun set we found *I. velata* in similar ponds beside a river one kilometre up the road (43°21'19.7"N, 6°26'2.1"E).

Moving on to Hotel 7 in Vidauban we met up with Rémy and Annie Prelli and Pascal Holvec to complete the group. We went into town for a pleasant meal and discussed the possibilities for the days ahead.

Wednesday 3rd

Paul Ripley

Roquebrune is an isolated massif about 350 metres in height, a few kilometres from Vidauban and lying in the plain between the coastal hills and the limestone 'Pre-Alps'. Looking like an extinct volcano, it is in fact entirely composed of sedimentary conglomerate. It is home to a special flora, including the micro-endemic *Viola roccabrunensis*. We were joined by Denis Gynouvès who, like Pascal, works for the Office National des Forêts.

We started from La Haute Rouquaire (43°26'53.3"N, 6°35'39.6"E), where *Ophioglossum lusitanicum* was growing in the short turf and was not frosted like the plants we had seen the previous day. Climbing through the shrub and evergreen oaks, *Quercus suber* and *Q. ilex*, we noted *Polypodium cambricum*, *Anogramma leptophylla*, *Selaginella denticulata*, *Asplenium onopteris*, *A. obovatum* subsp. *lanceolatum* and *A. trichomanes*, assumed to be subsp. *quadrialeans*. Higher up, in crevices between more exposed rocks, we saw *Notholaena marantae*, and *Cheilanthes tinaei* with its very characteristic red-brown glandular hairs.

We then spent some time searching on steep rock-faces where some interesting aspleniums grew. We found *Asplenium foreziense* (the allotetraploid formed originally from a cross between *A. fontanum* and *A. obovatum* subsp. *obovatum*), *A. obovatum* subsp. *obovatum* and the triploid hybrid *A. × krameri* (*A. foreziense* × *A. obovatum* subsp. *obovatum*). Apart from the narrower fronds of *A. foreziense*, these are distinguished principally by the shape of the pinnule teeth and the dividing sinuses – difficult!

Around Vidauban is a fascinating heath, which is wet in winter, with temporary streams and pools, but bone-dry in summer. Stopping at Catchéou (43°30'07.0"N, 6°36'15.0"E), we saw *Selaginella denticulata*, and *Ranunculus ophioglossifolium* – known from only one locality in Britain, but not the *Isoetes velata* that we had come to look for. Probably the water here was too deep. Impending darkness forced our return to Vidauban.

Thursday 4th

Rémy Prelli



photo: A. Prelli

Pat Acock, Paul Ripley & Rémy Prelli above Toulon, Var, France

summer is scarcely favourable to ferns; only odd plants of *Asplenium trichomanes* subsp. *quadrialeans*, *A. ruta-muraria*, *A. ceterach* and *Polypodium cambricum* were seen in the

This third day was devoted to limestone rocks around Toulon. After a fairly labyrinthine passage through the outskirts of the town, we met up again with Henri Michaud from the Conservatoire Botanique National Méditerranéen, Yves Morvant and Nicolas Crouzet at the foot of the Baou de Quatre-Aures (43°09'36.3"N, 5°53'50.9"E), a collection of exposed limestone cliffs to the south of and overlooking Toulon. A path through a Mediterranean habitat of *Quercus ilex*, *Q. coccifera* and *Pinus halepensis* led us to the base of rocky bluffs where we found a beautiful population of *Asplenium petrarchae*. The dryness in

less exposed places. A little below the main promontory, our colleagues took us to see *Asplenium* × *helii* nothosubsp. *lainzii*, the tetraploid hybrid between *A. petrarchae* subsp. *petrarchae* and *A. trichomanes* subsp. *quadrivalens*, recently discovered in a shaded fissure, as well as a small colony of *Cheilanthes acrostica*. Apart from ferns, we noted the presence of the juniper *Juniperus phoenicea* on the cliff, as well as the first flowering of *Narcissus dubius* and the orchid *Himantoglossum robertianum* (*Barlia robertiana*), all much appreciated in pleasant sunshine.

In more cloudy conditions, we drove in the afternoon 25km to the north of Toulon to the crest of the mountain of La Loube, which overlooks the village of La Roquebrussanne (43°22'05.1"N, 5°59'31.4"E). At about 800 metres altitude, under a mixed cover of *Quercus ilex* and *Q. pubescens* characteristic of the sub-mediterranean habitat type, great blocks of dolomitic limestone sheltered an abundance of spleenworts: *Asplenium fontanum*, *A. ceterach*, *A. ruta-muraria*, and several forms of *A. trichomanes* which were the main reason for our visit here. Besides plants typical of subsp. *quadrivalens*, smaller plants with a broad terminal pinnule corresponded to subsp. *inexpectans*, a rare calcicolous diploid recently discovered here by Sébastien and whose identity has been confirmed by Ronnie Viane using flow cytometry. Several plants with a morphology more or less suggestive of subsp. *hastatum* stimulated discussion without any firm conclusion being reached. After a group photo on the summit, the rain that had been threatening drove us back to our cars and reminded us that winter in the Mediterranean is not always sunny.



photo: S. Sant

Top of La Loube, Var, France

Paul Ripley, Rémy Prelli, Denis Gynouvès, Pascal Holveck,
Annie Prelli, Sébastien Sant (*in front*), Nicolas Crouzet,
Pat Acock, Henri Michaud

Friday 5th

Annie Prelli

We had planned to go to one of the Hyères Islands, Porquerolles, and see the western Mediterranean endemic *Asplenium balearicum*, but heavy rain in the morning made us change our plans, and we decided to go to Marseille instead.

The morning was then spent at the Mont Rose (43°13'53.5"N, 5°21'16.5"E), which is a calcareous area with impressive cliffs. In the northern steep rock-face of the Mont Rose, in shaded crevices, grows the rare *Asplenium sagittatum*. Sébastien showed us a few clumps, rather high up but everybody was able to see them. On the same spot, only this time at the bottom part, were growing two nice plants already in bloom: *Astragalus massiliensis* and *Himantoglossum robertianum*. Shortly afterwards the wind blew away the clouds enabling us to enjoy the beautiful scenery. After this long stop, we drove a little further to the Calanques and enjoyed a local lunch in a good 'restaurant marseillais'.

The afternoon was sunny, so, on the way back to Vidauban, we stopped at Le Cannet-des-Maures (43°23'19.4"N, 6°23'31.2"E) and saw *Isoetes histrix* in small flooded dips under parasol pines (*Pinus pinea*).

Our last site was the Lac des Aurèdes, in the late afternoon. We stopped briefly because the water was too deep once more and we could not see *Isoetes velata*. We left at nightfall and since it had probably rained more here than in Marseille, 'mud' and 'pond' seemed the best words to describe our way by car along the endless tracks through the Massif des Maures. We let out a sigh of relief when we arrived at 7.30 p.m. at the main road. We must thank our two drivers Pascal and Rémy.

After dinner, we said goodbye to Patrick and Paul who had to make an early start the next morning.



photo: A. Prelli

Pascal Holveck & Rémy Prelli
photograph *Isoetes megasporos*

Conclusion

Pat Acock

These short breaks to the continent are relatively cheap and the journeys are in the main trouble-free and quick. Paul and I are amazed that more people do not attend.

We sincerely thank Sébastien Sant, who suggested the meeting and planned most interesting and varied habitats to visit in the beautiful department of Var. We also thank him for encouraging friends old and new to join us – they added greatly to our understanding of Var and their companionship was a delight.

SOUTH-WEST IRELAND – 11-16 July (Leader: Jim Dennison)

This trip was a truly international gathering, with over 30 members from Ireland, the UK, USA and Germany meeting for a tour of the south-west of Ireland that included visits to notable gardens as well as botanising in the wild. 'Ireland is not called the Emerald Isle for nothing' – all that wonderful verdancy is the result of plenty of water and although it rained for most of the week, this did not detract from our enjoyment of the country, the ferning activities and meeting up with old friends.

Sunday 11th – Athlacca, Carrigeenamronety Mountain & Garrycloyne Martin Rickard

The bulk of the party gathered at BPS members Martin and Debbie Begley's garden south-east of Athlacca, County Limerick (11/591329). The Begley's half-acre garden was awarded the title of 'Best Garden in Ireland' in 2007 in a national gardens competition. It was not difficult to see why. Debbie is a wonderful plantswoman who is known the length and breadth of the country for her knowledge and planting prowess. The garden was packed to the gunwales with plants of every description, the centrepiece being a large Thai House that Martin built in 2008. This was surrounded by *Dicksonia antarctica* plants. An attractive example of designing with ferns was a dense circular planting of *Matteuccia struthiopteris* surrounding a classical style sculpture contained within a low clipped box hedge. Martin's fern collection exemplifies his growing and active interest in fern culture in Ireland. The Begleys were extremely hospitable, offering unlimited tea and coffee as well as a wide selection of home-baked scones and cakes. Website: www.terranovalants.com.

After a very enjoyable hour or so we set off in convoy to the Ballyhoura Mountain Range on the Limerick/Cork border to visit our first site of the week for *Trichomanes speciosum*. We met up at 11/703169 with other members of the party who had travelled direct from Killarney. We set off along forestry tracks to climb Carrigeenamronety Mountain, which proved to be a very steep and breathless climb in parts. *Dryopteris affinis* subsp. *affinis*, *D. dilatata*, *Blechnum spicant*, *Asplenium scolopendrium* and *Pteridium aquilinum* were all seen in abundance. Despite fears that the Killarney fern has disappeared from most of its early published sites, it was good to see this colony still flourishing, although the large fronds looked very slightly stressed compared to its appearance during a visit to this site the previous year by Jim Dennison, Martin Rickard and Martin Begley. This site is described under the name 'Carrigeena' by Edward Newman in 1854 on page 286 of *A History of British Ferns*. Side by side with *Trichomanes speciosum* were *Dryopteris aemula*, *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum* and *A. scolopendrium*.

After savouring the magnificent views from the summit of Carrigeenamronety, the party slowly made its way down the mountain and set off for the third location of the day, Garrycloyne, near to Blarney in County Cork (10/6079). Here is one of the few recently recorded sites of *Asplenium onopteris* in the British Isles, the other stations in Ireland being in Cork, Kerry, Waterford and Wexford. *Asplenium* × *ticinense*, the very rare hybrid between *A. onopteris* and *A. adiantum-nigrum*, confirmed by Alison Paul during an earlier visit, was also seen. In proximity were *A. adiantum-nigrum*, *A. scolopendrium*, *Polystichum setiferum* and *Dryopteris affinis*. Several tripinnate plants of *P. setiferum* were noticed, as was a small colony of a fine form of *P. setiferum* 'Ramosum'. After an enjoyable viewing here and in the old St Marys Churchyard, the group made its way back to Killarney, which was to be our base for the rest of the week.

Monday 12th – Kilravock Garden, Co. Cork & Torc Waterfall, Co. Kerry Jim Dennison

Kilravock Garden is the creation of Malcolm and Phemie Rose and is situated approximately three miles west of Durrus, facing directly onto Dunmanus Bay in County Cork (00/930417). It is a two-acre garden on a hillside, terraced to make a series of gardens. We were met by Malcolm and Phemie and all 30+ of us were immediately brought into the house for tea and scones. Phemie gave us the background to the garden and then off we went to root around. The weather relented for the morning and one could feel immediately the humid atmosphere that is a direct result of the Gulf Stream, which creates the ideal conditions for all the southern hemisphere plants that are grown here.



photo: J. Dennison

Kilravock Garden, Co. Cork

Naud Burnett with Martin Rickard in background

Phemie's passion is restios and she has perfected the raising of this difficult genus from seed to produce a wonderful collection of plants, most of which surprisingly came through the harsh winter of 2010. Notable plants included *Chondropetalum mucronatum*, *Rhodocoma capensis* and *R. gigantea*, to name but a few. Other southern hemisphere plants included cordylines, agaves, yuccas, bananas and a wonderful collection of palms.

The Rose's interest in ferns came relatively late in comparison with their other plant passions, but they have created a wonderful fernery in the damp part of the garden where a tumbling stream from the hillside above gives perfect conditions for the hundred or so species and varieties grown here. The tree ferns especially looked as if they were in fern heaven, with *Dicksonia antarctica*, *C. gleichenioides*, *D. squarrosa*, *D. sellowiana*, *D. fibrosa*, and *Cyathea australis*, *C. cunninghamii*, *C. cooperi*, *C. incisoserrata*, *C. dealbata*, *C. medullaris* and *C. smithii* all flourishing.

After a very enjoyable couple of hours we said our goodbyes and headed back towards Killarney.

Torc Waterfall (00/965847) is a cascade of the Owengarriff river, tumbling 60 feet through Friars Glen on Mangerton Mountain, and is one of Killarney's most popular visitor attractions. It is especially famous in the folklore of ferns as it was here in 1804 that *Trichomanes speciosum* was supposedly first found in Ireland by a Dr Mackay. It quickly became known as the 'Killarney fern' and was in abundance at this site when described by Edward Newman in 1844 (*A History of British Ferns and their Allies*): "I have stood amid the roar of waters gazing on hundreds of the dark green fronds of this fern, as they waved to and fro in the agitated air, and sparkled with myriads of sun-lit drops." However, he also records that this scene was to be seen no more as the fern was ruthlessly collected. Over the past one hundred and seventy years, however, the fern has been recorded again from this site, the recent count over the past six years being 14 or 15 stations by Steve Munyard. With Steve's assistance we quickly located some *Trichomanes* after a hazardous scramble for some of us over wet rocks to the opposite side of the river.

Other ferns seen were *Asplenium scolopendrium*, *A. trichomanes* subsp. *quadrivalens*, *Athyrium filix-femina*, *Blechnum spicant*, *Dryopteris affinis* subspp. *affinis* and *kerryensis*, a new form of *D. affinis* found by Ken Trewren and not yet officially named but provisionally called 'Torc 1', *D. borrieri*, *D. borrieri* 'foliosum type' also found by Ken but not yet officially named, *Hymenophyllum tunbrigense*, *Polystichum setiferum* and *Pteridium aquilinum*. In a small cleft in the rock-face next to steps leading to the top of the falls, Ken refound the *Trichomanes speciosum* gametophyte seen during the BPS visit in 2003. This turned out to be hilarious as quite a few of the group stood in turn to photograph the gametophyte and were soon joined by a group of curious Spanish tourists who also queued patiently to take a photograph of what to all intents and purposes was a piece of wet moss cloaking the inside of the small dark cleft!

We then broke up to go back to our accommodation in Killarney after spending a fascinating day seeing a wonderful example of 'nurture versus nature' in fern cultivation.

Tuesday 13th – Derreen Garden, Co. Kerry & Ardgroom, Co. Cork Paul Ripley

We again headed south, this time through Kenmare and on to the north coast of the Beara peninsula where we visited Derreen Garden (00/7758), established in 1870 by the fifth Marquis of Lansdowne. Sloping gently down from the house to inlets of the sea, the gardens were planted with specimen trees, rhododendrons and tree ferns. It was clear, especially to those who visited this garden during the last BPS trip to Ireland, that little had been done to the gardens recently apart from basic maintenance. In a most attractive glade, Kings Oozy, fine specimens of *Dicksonia antarctica* and individual plants of *Cyathea smithii* and *C. dealbata* created a lush rainforest feel and some beautiful vistas. However, much of the garden was somewhat neglected from a horticultural point of view and *Dicksonia* had become a serious weed. Other plants of note were *Blechnum chilense* and *Todea barbara*. For the record, *Dryopteris aemula* was frequently seen and *Polypodium interjectum* was a common epiphyte.

After lunch we travelled south-westwards along the coast through Ardroom (00/648552) to a site near Eyeries where several colonies of *Trichomanes speciosum* were flourishing along the darkly wooded banks of a tumbling stream. We spent a little time here and particularly along the roadside verges, which were full of the greatest variety of ferns. We noted *Athyrium filix-femina*, *Dryopteris affinis*, *D. cambrensis*, *D. borneri*, *D. dilatata*, *D. aemula*, *Osmunda regalis*, *Blechnum spicant* and *Polypodium vulgare*. Ken Trewren found a plant of *Dryopteris filix-mas*, which is not common in this area. Growing on walls by the road were *Asplenium scolopendrium* and *A. adiantum-nigrum*. To our delight, Fay Mandt found a single plant of *A. obovatum* subsp. *lanceolatum* (*billotii*); a few other plants were found here but further along the coast road was a stone outbuilding whose wall was literally covered by the plant and we speculated that it was relatively protected here from slug attack.



photo: B.D. Smith

Martin Rickard, Jim Dennison, Paul Ripley & Mary Vaughan photograph *Asplenium obovatum* subsp. *lanceolatum* on a wall

Wednesday 14th – Blackstones Bridge & Kells Bay, Co. Kerry

Pat Acock

A significantly wetter day found us at Blackstones Bridge (00/707862) south of Lough Caragh, ostensibly to search the boulder-strewn woods near the car park for *Hymenophyllum wilsonii* and *Trichomanes speciosum*. The former was found there, but the finder discovered that the rest of the party had slipped away in the rain to find a little *H. wilsonii* amongst the *H. tunbrigense* further up the hill. In Victorian times people would come to walk under the dripping cliffs to wonder at the three filmy ferns, including the significantly more lacy *Trichomanes speciosum* var. *andrewsii*.

Wet through, the party went on to Billy Alexander's magical Kells Bay Gardens (00/557877). Fortified by hot soup and other victuals provided by Billy's wife and other helpers, we donned our sodden rain gear to assemble outside where the day was dryer. Billy explained that although there is no recorded history, tradition has it that a merchant family, the Blennerhassetts of Tralee, brought back significant numbers of Southern Hemisphere plants and built up the gardens around a one-storey hunting lodge. The house changed hands many times, with various families adding to and maintaining the gardens. Billy bought the 400-acre garden in 2006 and resolved to make it more accessible and sustainable. Billy and partners have worked tirelessly to recover the gardens from the ravages of time and nature and to restore as much of the decipherable plan as possible. The walled garden, a wild meadow and a board walk over the river and boggy areas have already been restored or created. Ferns too numerous to mention were seen and details can be found on the garden's website (www.kellsgardens.ie/). Needless to say, countless tree ferns of statuesque proportions and various ages and species abounded in this most wonderful and peaceful garden.



photo: B.D. Smith

Kells Bay, Co. Kerry

Steve Munyard, Sue Norman, Jennifer Ide, Paul Ripley, Kells Bay gardener, Michael Tuckerman, Ken Trewren, Sue Olsen, Diane & Richard Treganowan, Billy Alexander, Grace Acock, Wim & Naud Burnett, Jim Dennison, Pat Riehl, Martin Rickard, Fay Mandt, Pat Acock, Gill Smith, Quentin Alder, Claire Gotto, Joy Neal, Sarah Whittingham (*at back*), David Lincoln, Roger Norman, Christine Mullins, Anna Lincoln (*at back*), Mary Vaughan, Karen Munyard

Thursday 15th – Rossdohan Island wilderness garden, Brian Cross’s Garden & Garinish Island, Co. Kerry Paul Ripley

Rossdohan Island (00/717638), accessed via a bridge over the stream that separates it from the mainland, is situated south-west of Kenmare, just south of the pretty little village of Sneem. The significant planting was carried out in the 1970s and 1980s by the Walker family. It was then sold to a German family who lived in converted stables until ten to fifteen years ago. Since then it has fallen into neglect and the garden left to run wild. The group assembled on the cliff top by the original and now derelict house that was damaged by fire in the 1950s. The garden is mentioned in a number of Irish scientific publications due to the exotic plants growing there and alien insects found in them.

We began our explorations around the ruins, looking down into the crowns of *Dicksonia antarctica*, *Woodwardia radicans* and the native *Pteridium aquilinum*. On the walls were a number of plants of *Asplenium trichomanes* subsp. *quadrialeans*, *A. ruta-muraria*, *A. scolopendrium* and *Polypodium interjectum*. Alongside the steps grew stands of *Blechnum chilense*, *Dryopteris filix-mas* and *Athyrium filix-femina*, with *Selaginella kraussiana* growing in the grass in all open areas.

We then moved along a path through a large area of tree ferns, with some *Cyathea dealbata* in excess of ten metres high. *Cyathea cooperi* and *Dicksonia antarctica* were also frequent, with *Microsorium diversifolium* growing as an epiphyte. This has spread into many of the native trees, growing high into the branches. Native ferns seen included *Dryopteris dilatata*, *D. affinis* subsp. *affinis* and *kerryensis*, *D. borrieri*, *D. aemula*, *Osmunda regalis* and *Blechnum spicant*. *Hymenophyllum demissum* was found growing on the bank of a small damp gully. Continuing down the path towards the sea, a few plants of *Asplenium marinum* were noted growing on the banks of a ditch. We returned to the cars on a higher path,

passing a log covered in *Hymenophyllum tunbrigense* and a large *Cyathea medullaris* more than ten metres tall.

After eating packed lunches at the quayside, we walked the short distance to Brian Cross's Garden (00/718643), passing many of the previously seen native ferns and adding *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum* to our list. In the ditches at the roadside we added *Polystichum setiferum* and *Equisetum arvense*. Brian is one of Ireland's top gardeners and his principal garden, 'Lakemount' in Glanmire County Cork, is one of the country's most visited gardens. The garden is relatively new, with winding pathways, water and large areas of planting. The hard winter had killed a number of the tree ferns but the following species were growing well: *Polystichum munitum*, *Dryopteris affinis*, *D. filix-mas*, *D. dilatata*, *Woodwardia radicans*, *Osmunda regalis*, *Athyrium filix-femina*, *Dicksonia antarctica*, *D. fibrosa*, *Blechnum spicant*, *B. chilense*, *B. magellanicum*, *Lophosoria quadripinnata*, *Cyathea dealbata* and *Araiostegia* sp.

We then returned to the quayside and travelled the short distance by boat to Garinish island (00/697639). Garinish is a private island owned by a Swiss family who visit once or twice a year. They do not normally encourage visitors to view their garden so we were extremely fortunate to secure permission from them for the BPS visit. On the journey over to the island, seals were basking on the rocks. On arrival we were treated to tea, coffee and cakes before setting off into the garden in the company of Seamus Galvin, the Head Gardener. Next to the converted boathouse was a small flowerbed with *Polystichum setiferum* varieties and a well, surrounded by *Matteuccia struthiopteris* and with *Asplenium ruta-muraria*, *A. scolopendrium* and *Polypodium interjectum* growing on the sides.



photo: J. Dennison

***Microsorium diversifolium* growing as an epiphyte at Rossdohan, Co. Kerry**

Following the path through the woods, all the usual woodland ferns were seen, with *Dryopteris aemula* growing commonly on the banks and also large stands of *Woodwardia unigemmata*. *Dicksonia antarctica* was frequent, with *Hymenophyllum tunbrigense* coating the rock outcrops. Walking next to a pool we viewed large specimens of *Osmunda regalis* and *Blechnum chilense*, with *Asplenium trichomanes* clinging to the walls of a small sump.

Walking to a higher level we saw more recent fern plantings of *Woodwardia radicans*, *Polypodium vulgare*, *Cyathea australis*, *C. medullaris*, *Blechnum discolor*, *B. novae-zelandiae*, *Dicksonia squarrosa* and *D. fibrosa*. Growing on the tree ferns were epiphytic *Hymenophyllum flabellatum* and *Rumohra adiantiformis*. *Dicksonia antarctica* was self-sowing all through the garden and sporelings were given to members to take home to grow.

After travelling back to the mainland we made our way back to Killarney to meet at the Gleneagles Hotel for a group evening meal.

Friday 16th – Brandon Mountain & Milltown, Co. Kerry

Bryan Smith

On our final day of ferning it was perhaps fitting for the Americans in our party that our destination, Mount Brandon on the Dingle Peninsula, apparently took its name from Saint Brendan 'The Navigator'. Legend suggests that he climbed to the summit around 530 AD to see the Americas, before setting sail there. Once again, the weather did not look very

promising, with rain and clouds looming. Most people had checked out of their accommodation to travel back to Limerick, so the reduced car-sharing meant a lot of cars had to squeeze along the lane at the base of the mountain (01/492085). Along the roadside we quickly found *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum*, *A. trichomanes* subsp. *quadrialeans*, *A. scolopendrium*, *Athyrium filix-femina*, *Blechnum spicant*, *Dryopteris affinis* agg., *D. aemula*, *D. dilatata*, *Osmunda regalis*, *Polypodium interjectum* and *Pteridium aquilinum*. Heading up the lane towards the mountain, we saw a wall covered with nice colonies of *A. trichomanes* subsp. *quadrialeans* and later added *D. affinis* subsp. *affinis* and *kerryensis*, *D. borrieri* and *D. filix-mas* to our list of ferns. Further on, we passed a lake containing *Isoetes lacustris* and up the mountain track we found small colonies of *Hymenophyllum tunbrigense* and *H. wilsonii* and, surprisingly, a couple of plants of *Polystichum aculeatum*. It was also good to see *A. trichomanes* subsp. *quadrialeans* and *A. ruta-muraria* growing in their more natural habit on rocky boulders. But *Trichomanes speciosum* was our real goal and this was found by a small stream cascading off the mountain. Compared with colonies seen earlier in the week, this was a pretty meagre affair, but still good to see none-the-less. On our way back down the track, eagle-eyed Ken Trewren found a single plant of *Huperzia selago*.

We took different routes to our next destination, Milltown, and en route the Munyard/Smith group were fortunate to spot a roadside house wall near Gowlane with *Asplenium ceterach*, *A. trichomanes* subsp. *quadrialeans*, *A. scolopendrium* and *Polypodium* sp. The house owner was so intrigued to learn about his ferns we believe the wall will now be left unrendered!

Our final visit was to Dhu Varren Garden, the two-and-a-half-acre garden of Mark and Laura Collins, south-east of Milltown (00/840980). This proved to be a fantastic garden, filled not only with ferns but with cacti, palms and other exotic plants. We parked in their front garden by a small pond out of which grew a triple-trunked *Dicksonia antarctica* approximately four metres high, and made our way to the rear garden past an area with numerous, large *D. antarctica*. Over eight years, Mark and Laura have developed their garden, which was previously farm buildings and boggy areas, and have built two huge greenhouses (I use the term loosely because they were more akin to botanic garden houses). Both greenhouses displayed the plants in the ground in a naturalistic setting – one with cacti, the other with a variety of plants including ferns; I jotted down a few of them – *Blechnum tabulare*, *B. magellanicum*, *B. fluviatile*, *B. hastatum*, *Polystichum lepidocaulon* and *Asplenium nidus*. Outside, the garden included boggy areas, a board walk, a Chinese pagoda, a large carp pond with arched bridge, and a high viewing/dining area adjacent to the pond. It is always difficult to list all of the ferns in a garden, but the ones I did note (not including ones already mentioned) were *Cyathea australis*, *C. dregei*, *B. nudum*, *Todea barbara*, *Adiantum venustum*, *Phlebodium aureum*, large plants of *Osmunda regalis*, and an old watering trough (remaining from a demolished barn) contained *Woodsia polystichoides*. Such an achievement in a few years by Mark and Laura was incredible, and this visit was a fitting end to our week. We bade farewell to friends old and new before dispersing.



photo: B.D. Smith

Triple-trunked *Dicksonia antarctica* in Dhu Varren Garden, Milltown, Co. Kerry

ARGYLL GARDENS, SCOTLAND – 24-26 July

Saturday 24th – Ascog Hall Fernery & Puck’s Glen

Graham Ackers



photo: F. McGavigan

Martin Rickard & Sue Olsen at Ascog Fernery

Our first visit was to the Ascog Hall Fernery on the Isle of Bute (26/107630), known to many BPS members from previous visits and articles (see James Merryweather’s article in the 2003 *Pteridologist*) – but new to me, and something of a revelation. The internal walls of the L-shaped structure are below ground level and built of local sandstone with nooks and crannies to provide numerous habitats for fern planting. The splendid Victorian glass and iron roof was skilfully recreated with the rest of the fernery by Wallace and Katherine Fyfe, completed in 1996

and awarded the First Prize of 2001 by The Historic Gardens Foundation. There are many tree ferns and numerous other fern species – the New Zealand *Hymenophyllum demissum* particularly caught my eye, but pride of place had of course to go to the enormous rhizome/trunk of the very ancient *Todea barbara*. Sadly the Fyfes both died quite recently, but the large gothic style house, beautiful garden, and fernery were taken over by their daughter Susannah Alcorn and her husband Graham. This vibrant couple were most welcoming and kind to us, and played the perfect hosts by providing a wonderful spread of coffee, tea and cakes.

Returning to the mainland by ferry, we travelled north of Dunoon to Puck’s Glen (26/148844), a narrow gorge shaped by the tumbling waters of a tributary of the River Chaig. The steeply climbing path traverses the river several times in this atmospheric place, humid and lush, an ideal habitat for ferns – “one of the best places in Scotland to see native ferns” we had been promised. Indeed we recorded a total of 22 taxa. As a ‘southern-centric’ fern, what most caught my eye were the discrete groups of *Gymnocarpium dryopteris*, the large stands of *Phegopteris connectilis* and the common but beautiful plants of *Dryopteris aemula*. With the help of Ken Trewren, we were able to record all three species in the ‘affinis’ group, as well as *Dryopteris affinis* subsp. *paleaceolobata* and *D. × complexa*. But pride of place went to the filmy ferns, with vast curtains several metres in extent of *Hymenophyllum tunbrigense* occurring on the rock-faces higher up the glen, a truly remarkable sight. But not to be outdone, the slightly less common *H. wilsonii* included some unusually large plants of 15 centimetres or more in length.

This most successful day was brought to a close with a communal meal in a hotel just north of Dunoon, the dining room affording fine views over the Firth of Clyde.

Sunday 25th – Benmore Botanic Garden & Tainish Nature Reserve Janet Jephcott

Benmore Botanic Garden (26/141857) is a 120-acre garden gifted to the nation in 1925 by Harry George Younger and now a satellite garden of RBGE. The garden has an almost temperate rainforest climate with between 2,032mm and 3,048mm of rain per year, cool summers and relatively mild winters. Non-fern plants to note were the Redwood Avenue planted in 1840, *Magnolia wilsoni*, *Desfontainia spinosa* and *Fagus sylvatica* ‘Asplenifolia’! Before ascending to the fernery there was a huge swathe of *Matteuccia struthiopteris* and on the steep approach, beds had been recently planted with a selection of ferns such as *Woodsia ilvensis*, *Blechnum tabulare* and *Arachniodes standishii*, the ‘upside-down’ fern.

The Benmore Fernery was constructed in the early 1870s on a steep hillside. It fell into decline from the early twentieth century until restoration work began in 2008. It is now planted up with a range of ferns from many parts of the world, most grown from spores at RBGE, with over 75% of wild origin. They include *Thyrsopteris elegans*, *Todea barbara*, *Blechnum cycadifolium*, *Sadleria cyatheoides* and *Cyathea capensis*, to name but a few.



photo: R.G. Ackers

Benmore Fernery

Frank McGavigan, Andrew Tolman, Paul Ripley, Paul Sharp, Pat Riehl

Although there was little time to explore the rest of this vast garden, as we passed through we saw perfect hillside conditions for abundant *Dryopteris affinis* and *D. dilatata*.



photo: R.G. Ackers

Polypodium vulgare in Tainish Nature Reserve, Argyll

Neil Bancroft, Steve Haines, Craig Williams, Janet Jephcott

Tainish National Nature Reserve (16/737852) is on a peninsula of the Argyll coast near the village of Tayvallich. It is one of Britain's largest remaining native oak woodlands and has a range of habitats that include shoreline, grassland, scrub, bog, heath and woodland. There were masses of mosses and lichens as well as a good selection of ferns including *Cystopteris fragilis* amongst the ruin of an old mill. Filmy ferns can also be found at this site but we were not lucky enough to spot any.

In total we saw the following: *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum*, *A. scolopendrium*, *Athyrium filix-femina*, *Blechnum spicant*, *Cystopteris fragilis*, *Dryopteris aemula*, *D. affinis*, *D. borrieri*, *D. cambrensis*, *D. carthusiana*, *D. dilatata*, *D. filix-mas*, *Equisetum fluviatile*, *Polypodium vulgare*, *Pteridium aquilinum* and *Oreopteris limbosperma*.

Monday 26th – Arduaine Gardens

Andrew Tolman

The last visit on the programme for the weekend was a visit to the National Trust for Scotland Arduaine Gardens (16/795104), about halfway between Lochgilphead and Oban. I had long wanted to visit Arduaine, having met the Head Gardener, Maurice Wilkins (BPS member) at Highgrove some years before whilst he was on an NTS Head Gardeners Conference based at Cirencester, Gloucestershire. I am very glad to say that Arduaine

exceeded all my expectations, being a magical garden set in a truly wonderful location; even the damp misty weather seemed to add to the occasion.

Once we were all assembled, Maurice gave us a potted history of the gardens, started in 1898, and its owners – the Campbells, before it was gifted to the NTS in 1992. He also updated us as to the current situation whereby the gardens have had a reprieve from imminent closure so that hopefully sufficient funds can be raised to ensure its survival for future generations. Maurice proceeded to give us a full tour of the 20-acre garden set in a small Glen sloping towards the sea. One of the highlights for me was the tree fernery that he has created in the Hillside area, with *Dicksonia antarctica*, *D. fibrosa* and *D. squarrosa*, which had been under-planted with *Thyrsopteris elegans* that had survived outside for three seasons. Last year Maurice recorded -6°C at the bottom of the garden and -3°C in the higher reaches of this garden, which is not used to such temperatures! It clearly has a fantastic micro-climate as I spied the biggest clumps of *Asplenium scolopendrium* and *Blechnum spicant* that I had ever seen!

Down the slope to the Arboretum Walk and The Glen areas of the garden we found *Lophosoria quadripinnata*, *Blechnum magellanicum*, *Phegopteris decursive-pinnata* and, if I wasn't already confused enough by the *Dryopteris* genus, we found *Dryopteris pseudo-filix-mas* to add to my burden! Above us the very impressive climber *Berberidopsis corallina* hung from some very high trees as if natural ropes in a jungle! In a border near the Heron Pond I found a new cultivar not known to me but one I shall be seeking to grow in the Stumpery at work, *Athyrium filix-femina* subsp. *angustum* f. *rubellum* with its stunning glassy red stipes! Close-by I found a favourite of mine *Polystichum setiferum* 'Ray Smith', which I had first spotted at Tatton Park last year. As we were nearing the end of the tour we came across an enormous specimen of *Dryopteris borrieri* some three feet across and two-and-a-half feet high, which several in the group reckoned could be 1,000 years old!

It was a fascinating insight into a wonderful fern-filled garden provided by a passionate Head Gardener and fellow BPS member; what better way to round off the weekend! Many thanks Maurice for giving up so much of your time and making our visit unique. It will not be my last I can assure you of that!

As this was my first BPS weekend can I please just say a big thank you to Frank McGavigan for making it all happen and for the support shown to both Janet Jephcott and myself. Thank you also for kindly putting us both up for the first night and even for the tour of Weymis station when we missed the ferry! THANK YOU.

GARDENS OF SOUTH YORKSHIRE – 4-5 September (Leader: Paul Ruston)

Saturday 4th

Brian Dockerill

On a sunny but breezy September day, 16 BPS members met in the car park of Brodsworth Hall near Doncaster (44/505071). This fifteen-acre garden of Victorian origin has been well renovated to reflect the fashions of that era and was to prove a fine illustration of this garden style. Topiary, so often leaden and overgrown, was here youthful and joyous and the bedding scheme was simply stunning. We were promised an exciting range of ferns and in this it certainly did not disappoint. The fern dell had been replanted to include the extensive collection of the late Wing Commander Eric Baker and was helpfully well labelled thanks to the Yorkshire Fern Group. As well as a good selection of more exotic ferns it included many forms of British native *Dryopteris* and *Polystichum*, but it was the *Polypodium* varieties that looked particularly good at this time of year. This wide-ranging collection was very well maintained and a visit is certainly to be recommended. In the nearby quarry garden were several trunked *Dicksonia antarctica*. The last hard winter seemed to have killed the *Cyathea australis* in this spot, but we were pleased to see that the *Microsorium pustulatum* (reported in the *Bulletin* Vol. 7, No, 2, page 139) growing on the tree fern trunk was still in leaf.



photo: B.D. Smith

Brodsworth Hall, South Yorkshire

Paul Ruston, Lindsey Holleworth, Bruce Brown, Yvonne Golding, Jonathan Crowe, Paul Ripley, Gill Smith, Roger Norman, Brian Dockerill, Christine Mullins, Sue Norman, Sue Dockerill, Ann Hoare, Roland Ennos, Graham Hoare, Bryan Smith

After lunch in the café, we moved on to the nearby Cusworth Hall (44/546039) where a small courtyard next to the house – Lady Isabella’s garden – contained two rows of *Dicksonia antarctica*. The spot was cold and fully exposed to the east winds but the tree ferns were thriving despite having no protection in winter.

Our last port of call for the day was another restored Victorian garden at Wentworth Woodhouse near Wentworth (43/391978). Here our main focus was a recently replanted quarry garden. We first viewed it from above, where the numerous tree ferns were seen to best advantage and its overall aspect, sheltered by surrounding trees but open to the sky above, could be appreciated. We then descended to look at it in more detail. As at Brodsworth, a very wide range of ferns was to be seen – too many to list. Given the very dry conditions, a specimen of *Dryopteris cristata* caused considerable surprise – as did *Arachniodes simplicior*, hardly a common fern in public collections. Great interest was aroused by an area with multiple plantings of polypodies, each having fronds of three types and conforming to the general description of ‘Elegantissimum’ (syn. ‘Cornubiense’).

After a reinvigorating cup of tea in the café and a few purchases of plants from the garden centre, we ended a thoroughly enjoyable day with much to talk about over an evening meal in The Wortley Arms.

Sunday 5th

Bruce Brown

We started the second day, another fine and sunny one, exploring some old oak woodlands south of Stocksbridge. Glen Howe (43/296943) is one of Sheffield’s oldest parks with well maintained paths criss-crossing the slopes of the glen. It did not take long to find *Dryopteris dilatata*, *D. filix-mas*, *D. affinis*, *D. borrieri* and *Athyrium filix-femina*, and we soon added *Polypodium vulgare* colonising a wall-top, and *Polystichum setiferum*. A large well established *Osmunda regalis* may have been put in during the late Victorian period and behind it was a large *Dryopteris* which, on checking its spores later, proved to be *D. × complexa*. Further upstream by the footbridge were *Asplenium scolopendrium* and *Blechnum spicant*, by which time we had to move on to our next location, Bitholmes Wood, a mile to the north (43/296957).

This woodland was much larger and plant species such as melick grass (*Melica uniflora*) gave a good indication of its ancient woodland status. In addition to most of the above-mentioned we could add *Pteridium aquilinum* and *Equisetum arvense* to our list. *Dryopteris borreeri* was the prevalent member of the *D. affinis* complex in the wood and one large interesting plant that caught our eye was also confirmed by its infertile spores to be a hybrid, possibly a candidate for *D. × critica*. We reached a bouldery part of the woodland that looked an ideal habitat for the gametophyte form of *Trichomanes speciosum*. A likely looking colony under a large rock was closely examined but could not subsequently be confirmed, so this will have to be followed up at a local group meeting. Lunch was beckoning, so Paul decided to put off a visit to Wortley Hall and, with some juicy blackberries to temporarily sustain us, we drove the few miles over to Wentworth Castle (44/321034) for a welcome lunch in their café.



photo: B.D. Smith

Bitholmes Wood, Sheffield

Bruce Brown, Sue Norman, Paul Brown, Roger Norman,
Sue & Brian Dockerill, Roland Ennos, Gill Smith,
Katie Ripley, Jonathan Crowe, Tim Mabon

Wentworth Castle is a Grade I English Heritage site noted for its park and gardens and mock castle, all of which have undergone extensive renovation since 2004. We admired the classic architecture of the stately home, enjoyed the flowers as we passed through the formal Union Jack and Victorian Gardens, were intrigued by the elaborate folly of Stainborough Castle – built purposely for the children to play on, then entered the woodlands to find the Stumpery and Fernery. First planted in an old quarry in the mid-eighteenth century by William Wentworth, the second Earl, and enhanced as the fern craze swept through fashionable Victorian gardens in the 1860s, this area has now been recreated with old yew stumps, twisted rhododendron boughs and rocks collected from the estate and planted up with 50 different fern species and varieties. A small group of *Dicksonia antarctica* and *Matteuccia struthiopteris* colonies were benefiting from a water sprinkler, and below in the stumpery were many popular favourites to admire. One or two we mused over were thought to be *Dryopteris marginalis* and *D. goldiana*. All in all it was an excellent display and a credit to the Wentworth gardeners.

This was an appropriate spot to sincerely thank Paul Ruston for single-handedly organising this meeting around some South Yorkshire gardens, which we all thoroughly enjoyed.

Postscript

Paul Ruston

Shortly following our meeting I returned to Wentworth Castle with the gift of a couple of ferns new to their collection. The other purpose of my visit was to collect spores for the spore exchange from that very striking *Dryopteris marginalis*. I had the company of the Estate Manager, Michael Klemperer, and Holly, a member of his garden team who is responsible for the fern collection. Both my hosts showed much interest in the BPS visit to Wentworth and expressed their disappointment at missing the opportunity of joining us; it seems they were not informed of our visit by those officials with whom I had liaised. Michael is considering seeking BPS membership for Wentworth. The good news is that funding has been secured for the reconstruction of the old conservatory and work should begin in mid-2011. Upon completion it will be filled with ferns and palms – interesting and exciting times are ahead.

I would like to say how much I enjoyed sharing in the overwhelming enthusiasm that was shown by all participants over the weekend – thank you.

NORTHERN LAKE DISTRICT – 23-26 September

On Thursday evening a good crowd of members and friends assembled in Keswick, our base for the weekend, for a briefing in the Parish Rooms by our leaders, Peter Campion and Mike Porter. After a brief opportunity to socialise over welcome refreshments, the weekend's programme was outlined by Peter, including mention of logistical issues and potential risks due to the weather and nature of the terrain. Members were then invited to introduce themselves before Mike's excellent illustrated overview of the Lake District's ferns, both those that we would see and a few that we would not, which whetted our appetite for what was in store over the next three days.

Friday 24th – Newlands Valley

Bryan Smith

On a cold, damp Cumbrian morning, 22 BPS members gathered in Little Town car park (35/231194), south-west of Keswick, and togged up ready for a day's exploring up Newlands Valley, following the course of Newlands Beck beneath High Spy and Dale Head. The sun did shine for much of our walk and despite the biting wind, the day was a most enjoyable fern hunt in one of the Lakes' loveliest valleys. We hadn't even got a few yards up the road before we had recorded *Pteridium aquilinum*, *Athyrium filix-femina* (including the red-stemmed variety), *Dryopteris dilatata*, *D. filix-mas*, *D. cambrensis*, *Polypodium vulgare* and *Cryptogramma crispa*. Even as far back as Roman times, the valley had been mined for its ores, so it was something of a surprise to find a patch of *Asplenium viride* just off the track (35/229184). We concluded that there must have been remnants of old mortar, or at least calcareous



photo: B.D. Smith

Looking at *Asplenium trichomanes* in Newlands Valley

Standing: Peter Campion, Robert Crawford, Matt Sibley, Trevor Taylor,
Megs Rogers, Mo Richards, Brian & Sue Dockerill

Kneeling/sitting: Bruce Brown, Mary Gibby, Alison Paul, Mike Porter

seepage, supporting its growth in amongst the rocks. Crossing back to the east side of the Beck, and further along towards the valley head, we paused at a large boulder (35/228171) that had *A. adiantum-nigrum* and *Cryptogramma crispa* growing naturally in its crevices. The boulder was our cue to head off the track up the slopes of the valley to explore some of the rock-faces and scree slopes. We were rewarded with *Blechnum spicant*, *Gymnocarpium dryopteris*, *Oreopteris limbosperma* and *Phegopteris connectilis*, and close by, our first clubmosses, *Selaginella selaginoides* (35/228166) and *Huperzia selago*. A little way down the slope (35/229166), a small fern attracted our attention and after a lot of deliberation it was thought to be *Asplenium trichomanes* subsp. *trichomanes*; Mary Gibby took a small sample for confirmation purposes.

We paused for lunch on the scree slope, and then headed up towards a lovely waterfall at the head of the beck. On the way, we encountered more clubmosses – *Diphasiastrum alpinum* and *Lycopodium clavatum*, a good stand of *Dryopteris oreades*, and *D. affinis* subsp. *affinis*. Leaving the waterfall, we added *Cystopteris fragilis* along the return track, took a welcome respite for tea and cakes at a nearby farm, and studied *Polypodium vulgare* on the walls around Newlands Church. Nominally, it was about five miles from car park to waterfall and back, but I reckon we covered over seven miles allowing for exploration. We had recorded 21 fern taxa, but my abiding memory of the day was the amount of *Cryptogramma crispa*. It seemed to grow everywhere – on grassy banks, on dry-stone walls, on scree, in rock crevices, on the sides of roads and tracks and on open ground – almost anywhere we'd explored. Truly, it is one of the Lake District's classic ferns.



photo: A.M. Paul

***Huperzia selago* in Newlands Valley**

Saturday 25th – Bowfell, Langdale

Bruce Brown

Day two was very much a fell-walking expedition. Starting from the road end at the Old Dungeon Ghyll in Langdale (35/286061), our objective was to see *Lycopodium annotinum* – to be found far up the valley of Mickleden, high up on the slopes of Bowfell underneath the crags of Bowfell Buttress. One could wax lyrical about the crystal clear sunny day and superb Lakeland mountain scenery we enjoyed, but here we must concentrate on the ferns recorded.

The walk along Mickleden was well clothed with *Pteridium aquilinum*, and wetter spots produced a little *Oreopteris limbosperma*, *Athyrium filix-femina* and *Blechnum spicant*, with the ubiquitous *Cryptogramma crispa* popping up almost anywhere throughout the day. A few *Dryopteris borneri* were not troublesome to identify, but by the stile near the hotel was one *Dryopteris* that we were less certain about; with its dark reddish brown scales it looked to be a good candidate for *D. affinis* subsp. *paleaceolobata*.

After passing a large sheepfold the serious climbing up Rossett Gill began, albeit on a well engineered path, but our pace slowed accordingly with plentiful stops to 'admire the views'. At a zigzag bend (35/249071) we struck off south onto unpathed terrain, even steeper now, but the rills and boulders produced more species to peruse – *Huperzia selago*, *Phegopteris connectilis*, *D. dilatata*, *Lycopodium clavatum* and *Diphasiastrum alpinum*. At last we reached our first patch of *L. annotinum* at 534 metres altitude. This clubmoss is well scattered in the Scottish Highlands but Bowfell is its only southern location. The colony

looked to be doing really well with its creeping shoots spreading through the heathy grassland and wrapping around stones and boulders. Fertile cones that puffed yellow spore clouds when touched were plentiful. We climbed higher to an even larger colony that was estimated to be at least 50 × 25 metres in extent (35/248069). Why it does so well here but is absent from the rest of Lakeland is strange.

We checked between the boulders for *Dryopteris expansa* (previously recorded here by Ken Trewren) and other ferns, finding *D. filix-mas*, *D. borrieri*, a lot more *Phegopteris* and a selection of buckler ferns. Mary Gibby showed us different forms of *D. dilatata*, and one or two likely *D. expansa* were found. One of these definitely met with Mary's approval and the GPS reading suggested that this could be Ken's plant. We then retraced our route back to the cars.

Although time was getting on, a few members stopped off briefly at Launchy Gill, Thirlmere (35/309158) on the way back to Keswick. We didn't need to stray far from the roadside to find lovely drifts of *Phegopteris* and *Gymnocarpium dryopteris*, and boulders clothed in *Hymenophyllum wilsonii*. There were also plants of *Dryopteris affinis*, *Polystichum aculeatum* on the bridge and *P. setiferum* by the stile, not to mention other species seen earlier in the day.

We later gathered for a convivial evening and excellent meal in the Rembrandt restaurant in Keswick. It had been a busy, active but enjoyable day, with 20 taxa seen.

Sunday 26th – Barf & Derwentwater



photo: P.J. Campion

Mike Porter points to *Asplenium septentrionale* below the Bishop of Barf, Cumbria

Having accomplished this mission safely, we set off to the National Trust Kettlewell car park (35/267195) on the shore of Derwentwater, where we squeezed our cars in and



photo: B.D. Smith

Lycopodium annotinum on Bowfell, Cumbria

Ruth Dawes

Another dry morning was a welcome start for us when we met at Thornthwaite (35/220265) to scramble up the steep scree slope (two steps up, three steps back!) to the white-painted Bishop of Barf landmark. We were rewarded with sightings of *Asplenium septentrionale* (forked spleenwort), which was much admired and photographed. It was best not to think about the going down so we scouted around and *A. adiantum-nigrum* (black spleenwort) and *A. trichomanes* subsp. *trichomanes* (maidenhair spleenwort) were also found at the foot of the Bishop.

admired the four-channelled leaves of *Isoetes lacustris* (common quillwort) washed up on the shore-line. The *Dryopteris* specialists were soon waylaid in the woods, practising their *D. affinis* agg. identification skills; all three species were found, together with *D. affinis* subsp. *paleaceolobata*. On the wall along the path were fine examples of *Polypodium vulgare* (common polypody) and *P. interjectum* (intermediate polypody), aiding comparison by growing conveniently close together. The pretty Falls of Lodore (35/265185) were photographed before we all took it in turns to balance on slippery rocks to admire a fine hanging carpet of *Hymenophyllum wilsonii* (Wilson's filmy fern) on a large boulder. Here too was more *Asplenium trichomanes* subsp. *trichomanes*. (Specimens taken from this and the Barf plant were later confirmed as this subspecies by Fred Rumsey.) We then enthusiastically knelt in the wet and mud, torches in hand, to pay homage to gametophytes of *Trichomanes speciosum* (Killarney fern) on the roof of their low hole in the rocks. Lush patches of *Gymnocarpium dryopteris* (oak fern) were noted on rotting wood, but we could not linger as we had to move our cars to car parks near the landing stage on Derwentwater for our finale.

Parking spots were procured by various means on this busy sunny Sunday. *Asplenium ruta-muraria* (wall-rue) was spotted as we strolled to the landing stage to catch our specially chartered vessel. A delightful short boat ride took us to Derwent Isle (35/261223), by kind permission of Douglas Barnes, the National Trust tenant. We were joined on the boat trip by Sarah Champion and friend Valerie Stewart, hauling mysteriously large cool bags that we discovered contained our tea. Ted, the black labrador, welcomed us to the island and allowed us to wander his domain at will providing we threw his ball. *Osmunda regalis* (royal fern) had disappeared from the shore, but *Onoclea sensibilis* (sensitive fern) looked very at home naturalised there. *Selaginella kraussiana* (Krauss's clubmoss) was doing well creeping along in the lawn. *Osmunda* was refound in the garden, together with fine shuttlecocks of *Matteuccia struthiopteris* (ostrich fern) and pretty fronds of *Polystichum setiferum* 'Plumosum Bevis' (soft shield fern cultivar), reputed to have been first discovered by a Devon hedge-layer named Bevis. Among the scaly male ferns found was one identified by our experts as *Dryopteris borreeri* morphotype *rhombedentata*.

Exploring this tiny island somehow induced a huge appetite for tea and cakes, which was fortunate, as our finale was a splendid cream tea with award-winning chocolate brownies and Borrowdale tea bread prepared and served on the terrace by Sarah and Val. We did the tea good justice as we admired the open view of Cat Bells and around.

A well deserved vote of thanks was given to Peter Champion, Mike Porter and members of the North-West Group for all the hard work that went into this excellent and much enjoyed weekend and the wonderful tea.



photo: G. Smith

Returning from Derwent Isle

Ruth Dawes, Alison Paul, Megs Rogers, Sarah Champion, Christine Mullins, Mike Porter,
Robert Sykes, Peter Champion, Sue Dockerill, Trevor Taylor, Bruce Brown,
David Benham, Brian Dockerill, Betty King, Bryan Smith