



Despite a less than promising start to the day weatherwise, the first meeting of this newly formed group turned out to be a great success, as **Mark Pool** describes.

Devon bryophyte group

The newly formed Devon Bryophyte Group held its first meeting on 20 August. The venue was the Dart Valley downstream of Dartmeet, starting at the Cumston (or Combestone) Tor car park (SX6771). Eleven people attended, with a good mix of beginners and more expert; we were particularly pleased to welcome Ian Atherton and Sharon Pilkington (from Hampshire and Wiltshire respectively; they both deserve medals for effort!).

Initially, the meeting appeared to be over before it had started; participants gathered at the exposed car park in heavy rain and took some persuading to leave their cars! After some discussion we decided to start anyway and hope for a clearance; as we intended to move downhill to the promising valley woodlands, there was at least a likelihood of shelter.

Our determination was soon rewarded; the rain started to slacken and bryophytes began to be noted among the moorland turf and bracken. Initially, only common species were found, but it was useful to be able to show beginners the difference between *Hylocomium splendens* and *Pleurozium schreberi*, while a small hawthorn tree provided a few epiphytes. Once we entered Cumston Wood, the latter became much more obvious; *Ulota bruchii* and *U. crista* were both noted almost immediately on an oak bough, as was the difficulty of distinguishing them in the field when wet! As so often, they were accompanied by *Metzgeria temperata* and *Microlejeunea ulicina*.

As the group moved further down into the wood, the bryoflora became correspondingly richer. As is usual in these woodlands, boulders were covered



by a luxuriant growth which included *Isoetes myosuroides*, *Plagiothecium undulatum*, *Rhytidadelphus loreus*, *Hypnum andoi* (definitely not confined to bark hereabouts) and *Scapania gracilis*. Roy Jeffery found a splendid mixed stand of *R. loreus* and *R. triquetrus*, and was able to demonstrate their salient characters to those not already 'in the know'. Mark Pool went into his usual raptures over the plentiful *Nowellia curvifolia*; here and there it was accompanied on rotting logs by the small but distinctive *Scapania umbrosa*. *Bazzania trilobata* and *Plagiochila spinulosa*, two more liverworts of moist, upland western woodlands, were also present locally.

△ Cumston (Combestone) Tor, Dartmoor (left) and *Dicranum majus* (right). I. Atherton

◁ *Polytrichum commune* in Cumston Wood. I. Atherton



Largely to escape the local midges, lunch was taken on boulders in and by the river; the rain had now stopped and the weather was steadily turning sunny. The rocks again produced a good variety of species: common ones like *Pogonatum urnigerum* and *Thamnobryum alopecurum*, and rarer ones such as *Isothecium holtii* (locally abundant on the sides of boulders) and (rather surprisingly this far up-river) *Porella pinnata*. *Marsupella emarginata* var. *aquatica* (amazingly wanted as a South Devon 'de-bracketing') was also collected here and was subsequently confirmed as correct.

After lunch, the group started up the valley of the Aller Brook, an attractive tributary stream with a number of small waterfalls. Here Sharon made the best discovery of the day, a good stand of *Sphagnum girgensohnii* (again later accepted as a voucher) at the foot of a steep bank. This was



◁ *Heterocladium heteropterum* var. *heteropterum* (top) and *Scapania nemorea* (middle) in Cumston Wood. I. Atherton

▽ Identifying epiphytes. From left to right, Nigel Pinhorn, Roy Jeffrey and Jeremy Barker, with BBS *Field Guide!* I. Atherton



△ Sharon's find of the day: *Sphagnum girgensohnii*, Cumston Wood. I. Atherton



△ Down by the river. *Isothecium holtii* (top), *Pogonatum urnigerum* (bottom). I. Atherton

▽ The group. From left to right: Jo Marsh, Andrew Cunningham, Christine Preston, David Trude, Jeremy Barker (at rear), Tim Purches, Sharon Pilkington, Mark Pool, Nigel Pinhorn and Roy Jeffery (pointing to the first *S. girgensohnii* patch found). I. Atherton





△ *Sphagnum palustre*. I. Atherton

the first confirmed record of the species from the entire south-west peninsula, and therefore a very good find; maybe we can now turn it up in v.-c. 4? Sharon also discovered a good patch of *Loeskeobryum brevirostre* on a nearby boulder; this was later unwittingly sat on by Mark, but mercifully without terminal damage to either party. A search of the stream gully for *Jubula* proved unsuccessful, but compensation came later in the shape of further large colonies of *Sphagnum girgensohnii*, some several metres across; we ‘locals’ must surely have been overlooking this in the past?

Most of the bryophyte species in the Aller Brook valley were the same as those found during the morning, but the small liverwort *Plagiochila punctata*, seen on a few trees and on a mossy boulder, was an interesting extra. On emerging from the wood, into bright sunshine, a small amount of *Thuidium delicatulum* was found in a flush. Neighbouring willow trees were searched, unsuccessfully, for *Colura calyptrifolia*; this is becoming quite frequent on willows in parts of Cornwall, but so far the only Devon record is from *Nothofagus* at Fernworthy. *Neckera pumila*, a local species on Dartmoor,

provided some consolation. Continuing on up the brook, now mostly on open moorland, Roy Jeffery was able to introduce the beginners to some of the common species of *Sphagnum* on the way back to the cars.

The consensus among those attending was that the day had gone well, with beginners learning a considerable amount and some very useful records being made; in addition to the two vice-county vouchers, there were a surprising number of new tetrad ‘ticks’ for the county database from what had previously been thought to be a well-worked area!

The second meeting of the Group was held at Berry Head (near Brixham) on 29 October. Full details of all future meetings of the group should soon be appearing on the BBS website. In the meantime, interested people should contact Nigel Pinhorn (devonnaturewalks@btinternet.com) or Tim Purches (tim.purches@talk21.com).

Mark Pool

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▽ *Bazzania trilobata*. I. Atherton

