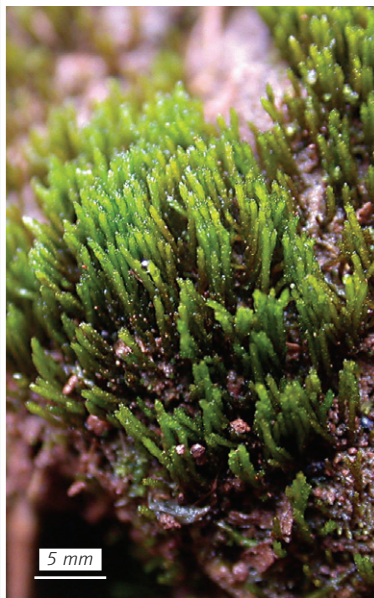
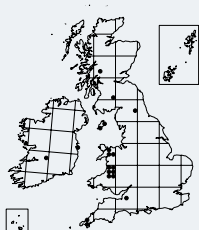


*Ditrichum plumbicola*

Lead-moss



**Identification** A tiny moss, unlikely to be encountered without specific searching. *D. plumbicola* is entirely restricted to waste from lead mines, where it grows as dense, narrow tufts or short turfs on highly metal-toxic spoil. The shoots are about 3–8 mm tall, dark green, with short, blunt, triangular leaves less than 1 mm long and pressed close to the stem. Capsules are unknown – *D. plumbicola* reproduces by protonemal gemmae and tubers.

**Similar species** *D. lineare* (p. 344) grows as similar turfs of slender, upright shoots, but has slightly longer leaves, tapering to an acute point, is usually paler green, and is seldom found at lead mines. *D. cornubicum* (Smith, p. 153) also has longer, acute leaves, which are not appressed to the stem; it grows on copper spoil at one or two sites in Cornwall and one in Ireland. *Dicranella rufescens* (p. 367) and *Dicranella varia* (p. 366) are often much commoner than *D. plumbicola* on lead mines; both have longer, spreading leaves and are brighter, lighter green.

**Habitat** *D. plumbicola* is restricted to the most toxic parts of abandoned lead mines. It grows on very fine, silt-like spoil, which usually differs from coarser spoil by having an irregular, frost-heaved surface. Settling pits, and spoil spilled from them, often provide a suitably fine, metal-rich substrate. Damp but not waterlogged areas are more favoured than dry ones, and *D. plumbicola* appears to be sensitive to droughts, so in the summer is often restricted to spoil on the shaded side of small rocks.