



Friezland Wood, East Sussex (VC 14)

21 November 2015

Administratively, Friezland Wood is now within the modern county of Kent, and is on the edge of Tunbridge Wells. However, it is within the Watsonian vice-county of East Sussex, the boundary of which follows the river Grom. The wood itself is owned and managed by the Woodland Trust and is a relatively small site of about 19 acres, but includes large outcrops of Ardingly Sandstone, which are an extension of those in the neighbouring High Rocks site. A good range of the Wealden sandrock species have been recorded here in the past, though as the site hadn't been recorded thoroughly for some years it was certainly worth a visit.

A small group of nine turned up on the first sub-zero day of the season, several reporting snow early in the morning on Ashdown Forest. Undeterred, Stephen Lemon led us through the woods, with the initial interest being in the epiphytes. Several trees had *Dicranum tauricum* growing on them, clearly demonstrating their easily-broken leaves, and many other trees were host to both *Metzgeria consanguinea*, with its marginal gemmae, and *M. furcata*, enabling the two species to be easily compared.

The river Grom provided several different species, though the presence of a 2m-high slippery muddy bank above it rather discouraged most of us from lowering ourselves into the river to have a close

BBS south east group: meeting report

look. Happily, a few did give it a go, didn't fall in, and even passed up samples for the less adventurous members of the party to look at. In addition to *Plagiomnium rostratum*, some of the tree roots on the stream edge harboured *Cirriphyllum crassinervium*, and an Alder had some *Plagiothecium nemorale* living on it. A patch of *Chiloscyphus polyanthos* was also found by the path, much higher above the river than might otherwise be expected.



Odontoschisma denudatum

Heading towards the rock outcrops, some *Plagiochila asplenioides* on a bank served to indicate that we were approaching liverwort country. Sure enough, some of the smaller boulders in the stream proved to have *Harpanthus scutatus* on them, and other rocks had a covering of the moss *Heterocladium heteropterum*.

Starting to look at the sandstone in earnest, a great number of the typical species turned up. As well as extensive mats of *Tetraphis pellucida* and *Lepidozia reptans*, several rocks hosted *Odontoschisma denudatum*

with its distinctive gemmae. On others were found *Lophozia ventricosa*, and enough plants for a

detailed *Cephalozia* workshop. As well as the common *Cephalozia bicuspidata*, *C. lunulifolia* was locally abundant, and both *C. catenulata* and *C. connivens* were found, the latter with its large cells, even observable with a hand lens.



Cephalozia connivens



Cephalozia catenulata

Many of the species on the Wealden sandrock more typically have an Oceanic distribution, none more so than *Dicranum scottianum*, so it was nice to see that as well, having also recorded it at nearby Eridge Rocks last year.

BBS south east group: meeting report

A new species for the site was the spectacular *Bazzania trilobata*, growing on a single shaded rock near another rock which was one of two locations for *Scapania gracilis*. This could easily be compared with other species in the genus, since a few yards away were found *S. nemorea*, and (on a single rock) *S. umbrosa*.

The latter species was on a particularly significant rock, which occupied us for some time, as it also hosted a large mat of *Harpanthus scutatus*, as well as the second population of *Scapania gracilis*, plus *Lophozia ventricosa*, the unmistakable *Nowellia curvifolia*, and a few scattered patches of *Tritomaria exsectiformis*.



Dicranum scottianum



Scapania gracilis

Now reaching the end of the publicly-accessible part of the rocks, the light was going and the temperature was dropping fast. In four and a half hours we had covered under a kilometre, so we now sped back to our cars to warm up.

As expected, it was a very interesting day out, offering the chance to find some very unusual plants for the south east. However, rarities like *Orthodontium gracile* have been recorded there in the past, but there was no sign of that now, many of the rocks being covered by the alien *O. lineare* instead. Nevertheless, as Tom Ottley noted, "The *Bazzania* was new for the site which is now known to hold almost all the sandrock specialist species so it is quite an important place for bryophytes. Thank goodness it is in Sussex..."

Interestingly, the SSSI citation for High Rocks only mentions the geomorphology. It should certainly include the rare bryophytes.



Scapania nemorale, with attendant *Tritomaria exsectiformis*

BRAD SCOTT