Meeting report – BBS Spring 2011

Though well-recorded in the past, the Yorkshire Dales have been worked patchily in recent years. Gordon Haycock’s suggestion that Scargill House in Wharfedale would make a good centre for a meeting was therefore timely, and it proved to be an excellent venue as Tom Blockeel reports.

Kettlewell, Wharfedale, close to our base for the week at Scargill House. I. Atherton

BBS Spring Meeting
7–12 April 2011
Wharfedale, Yorkshire

Not only is it superbly situated, under wooded limestone crags with fine views across upper Wharfedale, but Scargill House provided flexible accommodation arrangements and the use of rooms for meetings and microscope work. The village of Kettlewell was only a short distance away, convenient for those who preferred to sample the local beers in the evening. Over 50 members attended all or part of the meeting, and we were very pleased to welcome two bryologists from further afield, Michael Lüth from Germany and Ben-Rong Zuo from Shanghai Normal University.

Excursions were arranged not just in Upper Wharfedale, where habitats are dominated by Carboniferous Limestone, but also in adjacent parts of Wensleydale, at Malham in Airedale, and on one occasion at Ribblehead in Ribblesdale. Most localities visited were in v.-c. 64, but several were in v.-c. 65 and these are indicated in the following account. Excursions were organized around two or three principal venues each day, partly to minimize pressure on habitats, but also to increase coverage and offer variety and choice for members. The BBS last visited the area during the spring meeting in Ilkley in 1983, and we had several participants who were “senior” enough to have been present at the earlier meeting!

An asterisk (*) in the following account indicates a new or updated vice-county record.

THURSDAY 7 APRIL
One group visited two limestone gills near Yockenthwaite, at Hagg Beck and Boulther Gill. These provided an excellent introduction to the flora of wooded limestone gills, and many of the distinctive montane calcicoles were recorded, including Cololejeunea calcarea, Leiocolea alpestris, Pedinoxydium interruptum (fine and plentiful), Seligeria donniana, S. pusilla and Plagiopus oederianus, as well as Porella cordaena, Preissia quad-rata, Scapania aspera, Leukobryum brevirostre, Plagiochilus zieri, Tritomaria quinquedentata and Orthothecium intricatum. In more open places Lophozia excisa, Reboulia hemisphaerica, Riccia sorocarpa, Didymodon ferrugineus and Entosthodon huhlenbergii were present on earth among rocks, and Brachythecium glaucum, Breutelia chrysocoma, Cladonia dendroidea, Ditrichum gracile and Plagiomnium elatum in grassy habitats and flushes. Schistidium rivulare and S. platyphyllum were on rocks by water and Tritomaria...
exsectofrmis was seen on rotten wood. Many of these species were seen frequently on subsequent days. Epiphytes included Orthotrichum pulchellum and O. stramineum, which after O. affine proved to be the two commonest corticolous species of the genus during the meeting. Higher up above the gills there is rough grassland and peaty moorland with a less calcareous flora. Sphagnum russowii and S. girgensohnii were recorded.

A second group visited the wooded banks of the River Wharfe near Bolton Abbey. Siliceous Millstone Grit is exposed along this part of the river, but the rocks close to the river are influenced by calcareous river water. The woods to the north of Cavendish Pavilion produced many common woodland species, as well as Mnium marginatum in riverside sand, Didymodon spaluceus and Dichodontium flavescens on riverside rocks, Porella cordaeana on a tree base, Plegiocolea britannica on a mossy bank and Microlejeunea ulicina on bark. Sanionia uncinata was found growing as an epiphyte. Further north is the Strid, a place where the river flows through a very narrow and dangerous channel. There are greater exposures of rock in this area, with Distichium capillaceum, Dicralthecia mucronata, Mnium thomsonii, Calolejeunea calcarea, C. rossettiana, Metzgeria pubescens and Pedinophyllum interruptum in areas under calcareous influence, and Amphidium mougeotii, Bartramia pomiformis, Pohlia cruda and Calypogeia integrisepala on acid gritstone. Jeff Duckett, who joined the group in mid-afternoon, observed that the riverside rocks at the Strid had deteriorated bryologically since he first knew them, now being dominated by coarse moss, presumably as a result of eutrophication. Scapania cuspiduligera, which has long been known here, could not be found. The wooded crags nearby are one of the few British sites for Distichium gracile. The old oak tree on which it was known to grow has now fallen and that particular population has been lost. However it is still likely to be present on the gritstone crags.

FRIDAY 8 APRIL

The main venue this day was the Oughtershaw area towards the head of Wharfedale. The focal point was Nethergill Farm, which is worked symptomatically for wildlife by owners Chris and Fiona Duckett. There was a wide range of calcareous and base-poor habitats. Nick Hodgetts found Tortella bambusera* and Entosthodon attenuatus (the latter being the first vice-county record since 1930, but not collected). Other records included Blepharostoma trichophyllum, Lophozia inconspicua, L. sudetica, Odontoschisma sphagni, Pedinophyllum interruptum, Ditrichum gracile, Polytrichastrum alpinum, Schistidium plathyphyllum, S. rivulare, S. robustum, S. strictum, Mnium thomsonii, Seligeria recurvata and Thuidium assimile.

Jeff Duckett took a group up to the high ground on Oughtershaw Side and over to Jeffery Pot. On Oughtershaw Side the highlight was Amblyodon dealbatus, found by Michael Lüth. The many other records included Metzgeria pubescens, Mylia taylori, Tritomaria quinquedentata, Breutelia chrysocaoma, Distichium capillaceum, Entodon concinnum, Orthotrichum intricatum, Plegiobryum zieri, Scopidium cossorii, Sphagnum quinquefarium, S. russowii, Splachnum sphaericum, Thuidium delicatulum, and three lowland species growing at an unusually high altitude of 460 m — Orthotrichum pulchellum, Ulota phy纤ntha and Frisadenia exilis. Jeffery Pot is over the watershed from Wharfedale, just within v.-c. 65. There is an amphitheatre of limestone crags at an altitude of around 570 m. Notable here was Schistidium trichodon, which was locally abundant, Barbilophozia hatcheri, Anoectangium aestivum, Bryoerythrophyllum ferruginascens, Pleiogus oederianus, Seligeria acutifolia and S. donniana, along with many of the species seen on Oughtershaw Side.

Various groups recorded other tetrads in Oughtershaw and Langstrothdale. Notable additions to species seen included Barbilophozia barbata and Entosthodon obtusus along the Dales Way up the valley from Nethergill (SD80BL), and Leucochea bantensis in Langstrothdale (SD80V).

Further afield, Tom Blockeel led a small group to Raydale, a side valley of Wensleydale across the watershed in v.-c. 65. After some confusion over car-parking fees and an encounter with a confrontational local resident, the party made their way to the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust’s reserve at Semer Water. The reserve consists of marsh and grassland at the head of a small natural lake of glacial origin. The marsh contained some large beds of Calliergon cordiform, which lacked strongly calcareous influence. Brachythecium miltum* was found on an old log in the marsh, Sanionia uncinata on sallows, and a few riparian bryophytes, including Orthotrichum rivale, on tree bases. A small limestone outcrop in a corner of the reserve was quite rich, with Encalypta vulgaris, Bartramia
ithyphylla and Pohlia cruda, among others. After lunch the party moved on to Park Gill, a limestone gill with two high waterfalls. Limestone boulders had Mnium thomsonii, Porella cordaeana and very fine Metzgeria pubescens, while Cololejeunea calcarea, Pedinophyllum internumatum, Seligeria pusilla and S. trifaria s.l. were found on wet rocks; epiphytes included Orthotrichum stramineum. A limestone crag in adjacent pasture had some nice earthy ledges with Entosthodon muhlenbergii* and Bryoerythrophyllum ferruginascens.

Another small group with Mark Pool visited Litton and Crystal Beck in Littondale, recording Breutelia chrysocoma, Ditrichum gracile, Leucodon sciuroides, Rhynchostegiella teneriffae, Scorpidium cossonii, Schistidium platyphyllum, Seligeria pusilla and Cololejeunea calcarea.

SATURDAY 9 APRIL

With over 50 members present for the weekend, there were various venues on offer for the Saturday excursions. Unsurprisingly, many members opted to visit Pen-y-ghent. One of the ‘three Peaks’ of the Yorkshire Dales, Pen-y-ghent rises to nearly 700 m and has exposed limestone crags at high altitude. En route, the party stopped to pay homage to the large population of Zygodon gracilis on the dry-stone walls at Giant’s Grave, also noting Grimmia dissimulata there, and then walked via the Pennine Way onto Pen-y-ghent from Dale Head. Gordon Rothero led the line of bryologists at his customary brisk pace to the base of the limestone cliffs on the east side of the hill. Schistidium trichodon was scattered on slabbly rocks below the crags, Anthotricha curti-pendula was on a boulder, Entosthodon muhlenbergii on open patches of soil, Pseudoleskeella catenulata on exposed rocks and Myurella julacea very sparsely in rock crevices. A further population of Zygodon gracilis was pointed out by Alistair Headley on its only currently known locality on natural rock (limestone scree) in the British Isles. Tortula lanceolata was noted on soil at 580 m, higher than its previous British limit. Other species on and below the crags were Metzgeria pubescens, Porella arboris-vitae, Rebouilla hemisphaerica, Didymodon ferrugineus, Ditrichium inclinatum, D. capillaceum, Orthothecium intricatum, Plagiothecium zieri, Tetraplodon minioides and Tortella bambergeri. Encalypta rhaptocarpa s.l. was also seen. Michael Lüth suggested that this population could belong to the segregate species E. trachymitria, but mature capsules would be needed to confirm this.

Siliceous Millstone Grit caps the summit of the hill and Andreaea rothii var. falcata, A. rupestris and Lophozia sudetica were recorded here.

Churn Milk Hole, a limestone sink-hole on the lower slopes was visited on the descent from the summit of Pen-y-ghent, and it proved to be interesting, with Bryoerythrophyllum ferruginascens, Bryum elegans, Entodon concinnus, Schistidium elegantulum and Seligeria trifaria s.l.
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A group with Tom Blockeel visited the second of the day’s venues, Cowside Beck near Arncliffe village. The Beck runs through a largely treeless limestone valley with north-facing slopes and crags. The route taken was from Arncliffe village, ascending along the Monks Road to the upper slopes, from where they worked two gills with waterfalls. On the ascent from Arncliffe they noted Hymenostylium recurvirostrum and Scorpidium cossonii in flushes. The heads of the gills at Dew Bottoms and Yew Cogar produced Jungermannia exsertifolia subsp. cordifolia (in a runnel), Grimmia dissimulata (on limestone boulders), Ditrichum flexicaule, Schistidium elegantulum and S. robustum. The two gills had a good selection of montane calcicoles, the one near Yew Cogar being notable for some very fine patches of Orthothecium rufescens near the waterfall. Another group with Mark Pool walked up the nearby Darnbrook Valley, a moorland stream with a mix of calcareous and acid habitats, and returned with a very impressive list of 151 species. These included Entodon concinnus, Entosthodon fasciculans, Plagiobryum zieri, Splachnum sphaericum and Thuidium assimile.

Another venue for the day was Malham Tarn, and several different sites were inspected. This is a very well-known locality, so new records were not to be expected. With Mark Hill’s expertise, Tarn Moss and the adjacent wetland produced 15 species of Sphagnum, including S. contortum, S. magellanicum, S. teres and S. warnstorffii. However, S. riparium was only just hanging on at its known site. Also noted at Tarn Moss were Calliergon giganteum, Plagiomnium elatum and Rhizomnium pseudopunctatum in calcareous mire, Mylia anomala and Odontoschisma sphagni on the Moss, and Loeskeobryum brevirostre, Porella arboris-vitae and P. cordeana. The calcareous wetlands at Ha Mire and Great Close Mire produced some additional species – Laiocolea bantienois, Scopidiunm cassinii, S. revouens, S. scorpioides, Splachnum sphaericum and Thuidium delicatulum. At Great Close Mire Nick Hodgetts also found Schistidium strictum and interestingly, on a dry stone wall, Pseudoleskeella catenulata.

SUNDAY 10 APRIL

The main venues on this day were in the Grassington area. Grass Wood, a Yorkshire Wildlife Trust Reserve, was visited in the morning. It is a large block of mixed deciduous woodland with much ash (Fraxinus) and a characteristic limestone flora. The more notable records, some of them new to the reserve, included Porella arboris-vitae, Riccardia palmata, Loeskeobryum brevirostre, Leucodon...
saururids, Platydictya jungermannioides, Plagiochila
hynchium striatulum, Schistidium elegantulum and
Thuidium delicatulum. Grassington Mire, a small
bog over limestone, was visited by two separate
groups. The visit to the mire got a mention from
the owner, Sue Woodcock, in her column in the
Yorkshire Post, observing that the bryologists
‘spent a sunny afternoon peering at tiny plants
and mosses all over the mire’. What they peered at
included 10 species of Sphagnum, Lophozia incisa,
Odontoschisma sphagni, Calliergon cordifolium
and C. stramineum. The Grassington area was once mined extensively
and for lead, and there are old workings scattered over
the terrain. David Long’s group visited the old
works at Yarnbury, finding

The party entered at the lower end of the gill and worked along much of its length. Many montane
calciocoles were present, including Pedinophyllum
interruptum and Seligeria trifaria s.l. The gill was humid enough for Plagiocolla spinulosa (seen on a
boulder and on a sycamore trunk), and there was plentiful Loeskebryum brevirostre. Metzgeria
conjuga was exceptionally fine on the side of a
boulder, and Taxiphyllum wisconsin was present. A
non-bryological bonus, fulfilling a life’s ambition for
Chris Preston, was a fine bush of Daphne mezereum
in full flower. The party returned to Langstrothdale
via High Birkwith. A grove of rowan trees by the
forestry plantation en route produced a remarkable
crop of epiphytes, including Rhytidocalyptris squar-
rosus high on a twig, Orthotrichum striatum and
abundant Orthotrichum pulchellum.

MONDAY 11 APRIL
This was an informal day, intended for recording
in under-worked squares. Most of the 10-km
squares (hectads) in the Upper Wharfedale area
are well-recorded but, surprisingly, the Aysgarth
square SE08 in Wensleydale (v.-c. 65) had only 60
species on the BBS database and was there-
fore our primary target. By the end of the day we
had increased this number to 232 species. In the
morning we recorded at Aysgarth Falls, mainly in
Freeholders Wood and along the river banks, but
also in the village, amassing a list of 127 mostly
common woodland and limestone bryophytes,
and among them Porella cordiceps, Schistidium pul-
phyllum, Seligeria doniana, Taxiphyllum wisconsin
and 10 species of Orthotrichum. In the afternoon
the party split into several groups. David Long’s
group visited Penhill Crags, a moorland area with
north-facing crags and bouldery ground. Notable here was Michael Lith’s discovery of
Grimmia hartmannii*, and David Long’s record of
Lophozia longidens, both species with very few
Pennine localities. They also recorded Bazzania
tridentata, Lophozia incisa, Scapania gracilis, S.
umbrosa, Andreaea rupestris, Bartramia ithyphyllace
B. acuta, Bryoerythrophyllum ferrugineascens,
Racomitrium heterostichum* (the form without a
hair-point, sometimes recognised as R. obtusum)
and Plegiobryum zierii. Tom Blockeel and Nick
Law visited Carlton in Coverdale and found a
form of Syntrichia virescens with gemmae on the
leaf lamina. They also recorded Leucodon
saururids and Schistidium elegantulum near the
village, and Lophozia excisa on a bank in
rough pasture near West Scrabpton. Another long
list (131 taxa) was compiled by Mark Lawley
and Oliver Moore in a gill near West Burton, with
Bartramia ithyphylla, Brachythecium ramosum,
Orthothecium intrastatum, Plegiobryum zierii,
Polytrichastrum longisetum, Metzgeria pubescens,
Preslia quadtata and Tritomaria quinquedentata.
Oliver collected Platydictya jungermannioides, and
confirmed its distinctive trapezoidal gemmae under
the microscope that evening.

Joan Bingley took a car load of little further afield, to
Leyburn in SE19, also in v.-c. 65, and they recorded
around the village and in the churchyard. Bryum

Δ Orthotrichum rivulare by the River Wharfe near
Buckden. Michael Lith

Δ Crags and boulder fields at Penhill. Michael Lith

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The rock is siliceous Millstone Grit, not far from Bolton Abbey Woods visited earlier in the meeting. The Valley of Desolation is a pleasant and partly wooded side valley running eastwards from Wharfedale, towards Kidstones Fell, just within v.-c. 64. Here we had only the one primary venue on this the third for England. It was good to confirm many county records. The number of that stiff erect leaves without papillae rule out S. patula and that the spore size suggests S. alpestris, a segregate of the S. trifaria complex whose status is uncertain.

Not surprisingly, epiphytes, especially Metzgeria violacea, Orthotrichum pulchellum and Ulota phylanthra, are much commoner than they once were, sometimes occurring high up on the moors (the two latter at 480 m on Oughtershaw Side). In spite of its recent spread, Colura calyptrifolia was still a surprise in a plantation on open moorland at 370 m. Riccardia palmate is also increasing. It was unknown in the Dales (v.-c. 64 and 65) before 1990, but was seen three times during the meeting.

The number of taxa recorded during the meeting was 390, and lists of varying lengths were compiled for 47 tetrads. The number of individual records at the time of writing is 4,153. Our thanks go to Gordon Haycock for suggesting and arranging the venue at Scargill House, and to all the landowners who provided access to sites.

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CONCLUSIONS
Most of the rare bryophytes of the Yorkshire Dales had already been discovered in Victorian times by bryologists such as John Nowell. It was not surprising therefore that we found only a few new vice-county records. Ditrichum plumbicola and Grimmia hartmannii were significant discoveries for the Yorkshire Dales, and the record of Lophozia longidens, though not new for the vice-county, is only the third for England. It was good to confirm many of the older records and to have updated lists for a large number of sites. It was also interesting to assess the distribution of newly recognized taxa. We found 8 species of Schistidium: S. crassipalum was predictably the commonest of the non-aquatic species, but S. elegantulum and S. robustum were widely recorded. Both Ditrichum gracile and D. flexicaule were present, but the former was the more common. Grimmia dissimulata was recorded twice, but is evidently rare. The identity of the Dales populations of the Seligeria trifaria aggregate is uncertain. They have small spores (around 15 µm) but there is some doubt whether they are correctly assigned to S. patula. Michael Lüth commented that the stiff erect leaves without papillae rule out S. patula and that the spore size suggests S. alpestris, a segregate of the S. trifaria complex whose status is uncertain.

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