



BBS Summer meeting 2023: Galloway, 10–16 June

Rory Whytock recounts a highly successful meeting in extraordinary conditions

The summer meeting for 2023 was held in Galloway, south-west Scotland. The lack of recent recording in the area suggested that it would be a good place to visit.

While it has much bryological interest to offer, it seems to have suffered from a lack of attention over the years. This is probably a result of the initial appeal of the location compared to other places in Scotland. Galloway lacks true montane habitats, it is on the edge of the oceanic range for many species that bryologists often want to see and there are no outstanding geological features in the area. When considering all this, most bryologists wishing to explore Scotland often head for more classic locales.

Despite this, Galloway is in fact far from mediocre. Indeed, it offers bryologists the chance to see an excellent range of species and

△ Figure 1. The beautiful coast at Knockbrev. *Rory Whytock*

the opportunity to discover something exciting. Those of us who like a challenge might also be attracted to Galloway as, perhaps surprisingly, many of its bryologically interesting locations lack public roads and are very remote with little to no access except on foot.

The base for the meeting was at Mossdale on the west side of Loch Ken. The accommodation was quite spacious, but did not have enough rooms for all members of the party, therefore some stayed in other accommodation locally. A total of 13 people attended the meeting: Claire Halpin, Michael Jeeves, Liz Kungu, Peter Martin, Andy McLay, Sam McVie, Chris Miles, Seán O’Leary, Sharon Pilkington, Gordon Rothero, Alastair Stevenson, Philippa Thompson and myself (Rory Whytock). In the account below,

all new vice-county records (nvcrs) or de-brackets are denoted with an asterisk (*). Unless stated, all sites visited are in Kirkcudbrightshire (vc 73).

10 June: Killiegowan Wood

The first day of the meeting consisted of a short excursion to Killiegowan Wood SSSI (NX5856), to the west of Gatehouse of Fleet. The first few of the group to arrive at the designated parking location explored Anwoth Old Kirk. Claire Halpin did much of the recording, but others joined in when they arrived. It was a ridiculously hot day (c. 30°C) which made exploring hard work and identifying the crispy bryophytes even harder. Nevertheless, a good range of species was recorded here including *Bryum pallescens*, *Cirriphyllum crassinervium*, *Gyroweisia tenuis* and *Zygodon stirtonii*.

Once everyone had arrived, it was time to explore the southern end of Killiegowan Wood, which had not been previously recorded. The heat was stifling by the time we set off, and, despite our enthusiasm, progress was slow. The group managed to get a list of 73 species, which would ordinarily be a disappointing number for the location, but given the weather, it was quite an achievement! Immediately adjacent to Killiegowan Wood, just beyond the SSSI boundaries, the group found an interesting mire at the northern side of Woodend Loch. It was here that many of the more interesting species were recorded. *Trichocolea tomentella*, *Calliergon cordifolium* and *Pseudephemerum nitidum* were found on the edges of the marsh. *Colura calyptrifolia* was also nice to see in some willow scrub near the loch.

11 June: Clints of Dromore and Cairnsmore of Fleet

Today was the first full day out in the field and there was an exciting choice of two areas. Both

were selected because of the lack of previous records. The Clints of Dromore (NX5464) had only four previous old records (as is so often the case in this neck of the woods; all from Derek Ratcliffe), and Cairnsmore of Fleet NNR (NX5463) had 14 earlier records.

Both groups met at the car park of the National Nature Reserve office where we all decided which site we wanted to visit. While there was the inevitable indecision within the group as to where everyone wanted to go, the swarms of midges helped clarify the situation very quickly! The majority of the group headed to the Clints of Dromore, mainly because the heat from the day before had not abated and the long walk to the crags at Cairnsmore of Fleet was therefore a daunting proposition.

Those who headed to Clints of Dromore made a number of good discoveries on the south-facing granite slabs. The 86 species recorded included a refind of the old Derek Ratcliffe record of *Braunia imberbis*. Other finds of interest were *Orthocaulis atlanticus** by Seán and *Grimmia decipiens** by both Seán and Pete. The highlight for the location, however, was surely Sharon's *Hedwigia striata**. Other notable records from the site included *Kiaeria blyttii*, *Leucobryum glaucum sensu* Ottley* and *Nogopterium gracile*, also all found by Sharon.

The Cairnsmore of Fleet group was much smaller, consisting of myself, Andy, Alastair and Sam. The walk in was a long trudge along forestry tracks and then through the tiresome *Molinia caerulea* mires, no doubt one of the main reasons why there are so few records for the site. We started recording once we got close to the Knee of Cairnsmore, where there was a nice selection of upland species including *Gymnomitrium crenulatum*, *G. obtusum*, *Andreaea hookeri* and *Kiaeria blyttii*. Within the block scree we also started to find some oceanic species

including *Plagiochila spinulosa*, found by Andy, and *Anastrepta orcadensis*. As we progressed to the north-facing side of the ‘Knee’ it was lovely to see *Bazzania tricrenata* growing in some abundance in both the scree and the wet heath.

We headed further up the north-facing slope where we found some upland springs and small flushed crags which contained some conditions that were slightly more base-rich than the predominantly acid geology of the site. Here we managed to bump up our species list with *Anoetangium aestivum*, *Pohlia cruda* and *Scorpidium revolvens*. Just as we were about to call it quits for the day, I managed to find *Bryum zieri**, on a small, flushed crag, a de-bracket and a nice way to finish off the recording.

There is a huge amount of ground to explore in this area, and the Spout of Clints area just to the north of where we recorded was very enticing. But time was against us, and the heat of the day had slowed our progress down, so it was decided that we had to make the slow march back to the cars. Overall, it was a very successful day for both groups.

12 June: Derskelpin Moss (vc 74) and Cairnbaber SSSI

The oppressive heat wave continued. Although it was nice to see a bit of sunshine in Scotland, the severity of the temperature was troubling when planning which sites we should target. One group decided to visit Derskelpin Moss (NX2658), a small, raised mire which held some potential for nice *Sphagnum* species. Conditions were tough, however, with the *Sphagnum* dried out on the surface causing them to lose much of their colour. Field identification was therefore an issue. Despite this the group enjoyed some good recording and did well to get *Sphagnum capillifolium* s.s.*, *S. medium*, *Mylia anomala* and *Polytrichum strictum*. The area surrounding the

mire also provided some good hunting ground, with Sharon Pilkington recording *Grimmia lisae* from the edge of Dernaglar Loch.

The other group headed to Cairnbaber SSSI (NX4876) which contains rather remote upland crags that have some interesting base-rich geology. This was another site that had few previous records (except a few from you know who... Derek Ratcliffe!). We started at the south end of the site and worked our way north. Once we hit the crags, it wasn't long before we started seeing some nice species. On some boulders near the bottom, *Grimmia donniana* was recorded, but as we clambered higher up the crags and found base-rich rocks Seán O'Leary recorded *Racomitrium ellipticum** and *Palustriella falcata*. *Grimmia* species were well represented here too, with *G. funalis* and *G. torquata*. I managed to record *G. atrata* here also, which is only the second record for vc 73 (and south-west Scotland), but it was a species on my radar as I found the first record a few years previously in a site not far from this location and with similar geology. Diversity was certainly high in this area with *Cololejeunea microscopica*, *Scapania aspera*, *Chionoloma hibernicum*, *C. tenuirostre* var. *holtii*, *Rhabdoweisia crispata*, *Schistidium strictum* and *Tortella fasciculata*. The recently recognised *Trichostomum littorale* was also found by Seán O'Leary.

The most notable find from this location was a *Seligeria* that I picked up from high up in the crags under a slight overhang. Despite doing my best I am still a bit weak with *Seligeria* identification. I thought that it was *S. pusilla* but noted that the spores were slightly on the small side. Regardless, I sent the specimen on to Sharon Pilkington as *S. pusilla* as a nvcr. Upon receiving the specimen, Sharon diligently re-identified it as *Seligeria calycinica** (Fig. 2). This is quite an extraordinary record in not only being



△ Figure 2. *Seligeria calycina* on soft crumbling calcareous rock, Cairnbaber. Rory Whytock

new to Scotland, but also as it is ordinarily a species found on chalk, though it does occur, more rarely, on soft limestone.

This site was an absolute delight to explore, not just for bryophytes but also for vascular plants, with *Thalictrum alpinum* frequent and Gordon Rothero pointing out *Potentilla crantzii* to the group which everyone was happy to see. The heat of the day was again stifling, and I'm sure we would have found more if the weather had eased off a bit.

13 June: Grey Mare's Tail

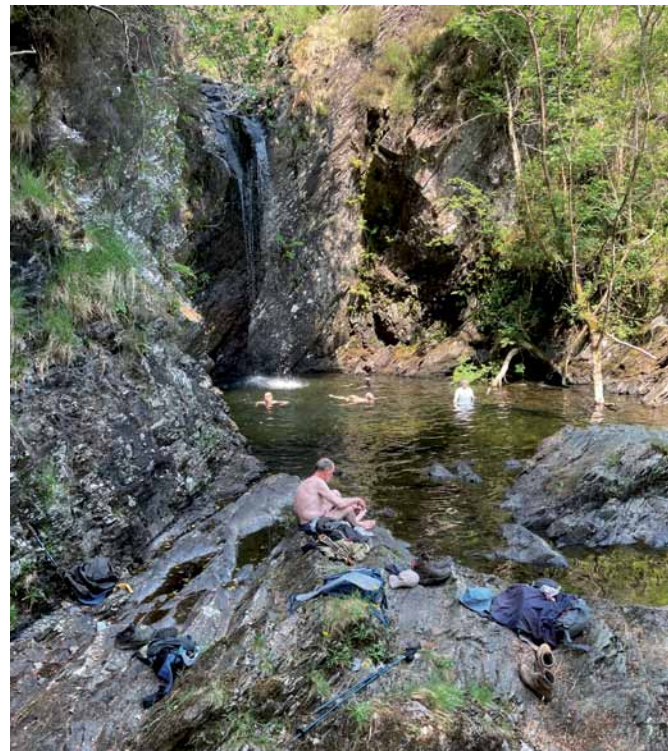
On the fourth day, we headed to a ravine which held a previous record for *Harpalejeunea molleri* and other oceanic species. It was the group's first exploration of a big ravine on the meeting. We all met up at the Grey Mare's Tail car park and split into two groups, one exploring the Grey Mare's Tail ravine (NX4972) (not to be confused with the more famous waterfall of the same name near Moffat) and one heading to Tonderghie Burn (NX4973) just to the east.

The first group heading into the Grey Mare's Tail managed to get a nice suite of species including *Hygrobiella laxifolia*, *Chionoloma hibernicum*, *Dichodontium flavescens* and *Ulot*

calvescens. Satisfyingly, the sought-after oceanic species not seen in over 50 years at the site such as *Harpalejeunea molleri*, were found. Additional oceanic species included *Lejeunea lamacerina*, *L. patens*, *Metzgeria conjugata* and *Plagiochila spinulosa*. Once again, however, the heat of the day was sweltering which left the first group no choice but to have a dip in the luscious pools within the ravine to cool down (Fig. 3).

The second group exploring Tonderghie Burn got off to a great start with Sharon finding *Schistidium agassizii** on some boulders in the flat sections of the watercourse just before the incised sections of the ravine. Owing to the prolonged heat, water levels were very low in the watercourse. This allowed the group to explore the deeply incised gorge more thoroughly than

▽ Figure 3. Bryologists cooling down at Grey Mare's Tail. Gordon Rothero





△ Figure 4. *Porella obtusata* on coastal rocks, Knockbrev. Sharon Pilkington

would normally have been possible. A similar set of oceanic species was found as at the Grey Mare's Tail, but with slightly more diversity; additional species including *Cololejeunea microscopica* and *Heterocladium wulfsbergii*. Other notable species recorded from this location included *Chionoloma cylindrotheca** and *Tetrodontium brownianum**, both found by Sharon, and *Pohlia elongata* var. *elongata**, found by myself.

14 June: Knockbrev

It was becoming a bit of a struggle to find sites where the group would not be too exposed to the sun all day. Sites with long walk ins or no shelter had to be ruled out as the direct sun and constant heat were too overbearing for us all. The east coast of Wigtown Bay at Knockbrev (NX5749) was chosen as there was easy access to the site, so people could leave if the weather got too much. Knockbrev was an interesting site as there were no previous records for the hectad NX54, but it is also part of the Borgue Coast SSSI.

The location was beautiful (Fig. 1). It had a variety of coastal outcrops, gorgeous, clear blue

sea and semi-natural woodland. The variety of bryophytes was admittedly slow to begin with, but we were at least working in the knowledge that all records were new to the hectad. The coastal rocks held much of the diversity in the beginning with *Frullania tamarisci*, *Grimmia pulvinata*, *Isoetecium alopecuroides*, *Schistidium maritimum* and *Zygodon stirtonii*. *Weissia perssonii*, always a nice species to record, was locally frequent on the same rocks. The short sandy turf was often pretty desolate, but in localised areas there were species of note including *Brachythecium albicans*, *Homalothecium sericeum*, *Tortella flavovirens* and the occasional stand of *Dicranum bonjeanii* where there was some sort of flushing. It was around lunch time, however, that we encountered some of our most notable species. Moderate sized populations of *Porella obtusata* adorning coastal boulders brought smiles to the hot and weary (Fig. 4). In the same area we recorded *Plagiochila bifaria**, *Scapania compacta* and *Nogopterium gracile*.

At our lunch spot, the group were once again struggling in the heat. I tried to sneak off, never wanting to attract attention to myself, to go for a swim in the beautiful blue coloured sea. It was delightful, but unbeknown to me, I had been spotted by Philippa who promptly came and joined me. This attracted many others who all couldn't resist the lure of a chance to cool down. It was a great moment, though getting into and out of the water was slightly tricky, which led to further frustration when, after we had finished and went around the corner of the next bay, there was a beautiful sandy beach from which we could have entered the water much more easily!

After lunch, we travelled further south along the coast which had slightly more cover, with some coastal woodland and scrub. This added much needed diversity to our species list and we recorded a very nice suite of species such as

Metzgeria consanguinea, *Microlejeunea ulicina*, *Myriocoleopsis minutissima*, *Porella platyphylla*, *Orthotrichum tenellum*, *Syntrichia laevipila* and *Zygodon viridissimus*. By this point, the heat had taken the energy from our participants and it was decided to head home. It had become a bit of theme of the meeting, long days in the field were very difficult to bear due to the intense heat, and we ended up wild swimming almost every day just to keep cool!

15 June: Rhinn of Kells

This was a day I had been looking forward to for quite some time; indeed, the Rhinn of Kells (NX5184) had been on my 'to do' list for many years. The site had been recorded previously on a couple of occasions including the last BBS meeting in the region in 1961. Interesting species found during that meeting included *Radula lindenbergiana*, *Sphenolobopsis pearsonii* and *Isopterygiopsis pulchella*. The site is very big, with lots of ground to explore and it involved long walk ins from the car park at Forrest Lodge.

The site was tackled by two groups, the first consisting of Sharon, Claire, Chris and Andy. Their plan was to explore the north side of Meikle Lump (NX5283). They managed to get a great set of records, not only for Meikle Lump, but also various parts of the Forrest Estate recorded during the long walk in. For Meikle Lump, a species list of 66 species included a suite of upland species such as *Gymnomitrium crenulatum*, *Kiaeria blyttii*, *Pohlia cruda**, *Racomitrium ellipticum* and *Tetraplodon mnioides*.

The second group, consisting of myself, Philippa, Pete, Seán and Sam explored the North side of Milldown (NX5184) but entered the site in a different way from the first group, having gone north of Loch Dungeon and crossed the Hawse burn. We made the long boring trek to the crags at the base of the hill, but it was all



△ Figure 5. *Campylopus setifolius*, Milldown, Rhinn of Kells. Rory Whytock

immediately worth it. Upon diving into the first deep ravine with high sided crags that we saw, we were met with lovely stands of *Campylopus setifolius* (Fig. 5), the first time it had been seen during the week and a great record as it is very rare in south-west Scotland. The distinctive *Pleurozia purpurea* was in close proximity in the heath and was also pleasing for people to see.

As we ascended the hill, we encountered many of the more typical species of this environment including *Gymnomitrium crenulatum*, *Bryum alpinum*, *Campylopus atrovirens*, *Grimmia donniana* and *Polytrichastrum alpinum*. We focussed on following the small but deep ravines in the landscape on our way up the hill. As we ascended, I noted a smudge on a wet vertical rock face. The material was hardly discernible to the naked eye, but the location and habit looked right for *Sphenolobopsis pearsonii**. I took a small piece off and what I saw under the hand lens helped give me confidence as to what it was. So, I keenly showed others in the group, and was glad that the identification turned out to be the correct one.



△ Figure 6. *Scapania uliginosa* near the summit of Milldown, Rhinn of Kells. Rory Whytock

As we gained altitude, the species composition kept changing, which is one of the reasons I love recording in the hills and mountains: the variety! The species list kept growing with *Ditrichum lineare* found on a disturbed section of a sheep/deer track, and *Gymnomitrium alpinum* and *Racomitrium ellipticum* locally frequent on crags. But the scree also offered much to find including *Kiaeria blyttii* and more excitingly (for me anyway) *Gymnomitrium adustum* and *Marsupella sprucei*.

As we approached the summit, Seán found an interesting small acrocarp on exposed rocks by a watercourse. It was troublesome as there didn't seem to be any capsules and much debate was had about the potential identification, but it certainly looked a good candidate for *Arctoa fulvella**, which it duly turned out to be. Fertile material was found later which makes things a lot easier when looking at this species. Not far from this location, there was a springhead where I managed to find *Scapania uliginosa* (Fig. 6),

only the second record for vc 73 (and south-west Scotland).

Needless to say, after we had summited Milldown and admired the views over to Silver Flowe and the Merrick, we had a swim in the Hawes Burn on our return. It would be rude not to by this point after all!

Gordon and Liz opted for an easier outing and decided to record at Mossdale around the main accommodation for the meeting. Here they dutifully recorded 79 species including *Lejeunea cavifolia*, *Microlejeunea ulicina* and *Hygroamblystegium tenax*.

16 June: Silver Flowe

We all gathered today at Silver Flowe NNR (NX4783). It is described as one of the best examples of patterned blanket and raised mires in southern Scotland. Once we arrived, we split into two groups to cover a larger area. Both groups recorded a similar range of species, but the heat of the week had dried many of the *Sphagnum* hummocks and bleached the colour out of them, as at Derskelpin Moss earlier in the week, which made field identification challenging. Despite this, the range of *Sphagnum* species did not disappoint. In the hollows and edges of the pools, *Sphagnum pulchrum* (Fig. 7) was locally frequent and not too hard to find. *S. austinii* hummocks were still very prominent, but so bleached out in colour that they did not look quite as impressive as they would normally. A range of *S. fuscum s.l.* hummocks was checked but only *S. beothuk** was recorded by Liz (though there are some records still to be received at the time of writing this article, so that may change). *S. medium* was frequent to abundant in the mire, but Liz again made a great find in *S. divinum** and *S. affine* was found in a neutral flush by myself. Unfortunately, liverworts were poorly represented in the final lists as they were difficult



△ Figure 7. *Sphagnum pulchrum* in a bog pool, Silver Flowe NNR. Philippa Thompson

to detect in the shrivelled *Sphagnum* hummocks. Considering this, Claire did well to record *Kurzia pauciflora**. Other notable finds from the day were *Fontinalis antipyretica* subsp. *gracilis** found by Sam, *Splachnum ampullaceum* found by Andy and *Odontoschisma fluitans* being still relatively easy to locate at the edges of the bog pools.

Overall, it was a great day... until Alastair started searching his rucksack for his car keys in a panic, only to discover that they must have fallen out on the mire somewhere. While bryologists may be good at finding small plants, it was agreed that it would be nearly impossible to find Alastair's keys somewhere out on the huge expansive mire, even by us lot. With a lot of organising and help from Gordon, Alastair had a spare set of keys posted to him the very next day and was able to get his car back safely from where he had left it.

Summary

The week was a great success, with many new areas covered and species recorded. I do, however, think it was a bit of an unusual meeting. I took the meeting on as the one originally planned had to be cancelled. While I had all the best intentions, it was really Liz who ended up doing

most of the ground work for the site visits. So, I will be forever grateful to Liz for bailing me out! In addition, the heat was exhausting from start to finish. This made choosing suitable sites very difficult, as some sites had to be excluded owing to the long walk ins on very hot days which made them unsafe. Also, the bryophyte interest at the sites we did visit was difficult to fully explore because of the crispy material we had to work with. Hepatics seem particularly under-represented from most of our lists, probably because of the amount that they shrink when dry which makes them more difficult to detect than mosses.

With all that being said, we still achieved a great deal during the week, recording many interesting, remote and previously unrecorded sites. As a result, our efforts were rewarded with a similarly interesting suite of records. In all, there were 1536 records made across 27 monads with 20 nvcrs or de-bracketers. Overall, this was an excellent contribution to a wonderful area that seems to have been neglected by bryologists over the years.

Rory Whytock

e rory.whytock@gmail.com