

CNS



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COVER PHOTO
PARK SLIP NATURE CENTRE

so ours was number 56. She pointed out that the youngster was female, as the spread of toes is different in the two genders when growing up, and she was running and jumping about as children do. My own deduction was that this was a hunting trip, since all the prints were heading west, or nearly so, into the prevailing wind, something early man would have known well to keep his family fed. All the undergrowth of bushes and brambles would have provided good cover to bring a close encounter when stalking prey.



By the middle of March a new protective cover of sand had started to arrive, and end of the month all these human tracks were again covered up. We know a good deal about the animals that prehistoric man hunted from the bone remains found in the caves in Gower. The chapter on mammals, past and present, in the Natural History volume of Glamorgan County History, printed in 1936, is most informative. Most bones were split open to extract the marrow, and included mammoth, red deer, horse and cattle, all killed, and eaten. There are Roman records of wild boar about in the woodlands around two millennia ago, so they must have been there long before that. Red squirrels and hares, and other snacks such as moles or hedge-hogs. He and his family had abundant fish, as well as shell-fish, and when in season there were berries and nuts to gather, sea-kale perhaps and other nourishing vegetable plants, the wild ancestors many of them, of some of the vegetables we enjoy today.

I will not easily forget my late father's comment to me that day on the beach in 1938, when I was 15, "keep your eyes open, John, at these peat beds in the ahead you never know what you may find." Prophetic words, indeed.

plenty of footprints behind to tell us they had been there as well. Their young, easy prey provided tender meat for the whole family, to come on the menu all those years ago.

By mid- January the vast new areas of peat, blue clay and pebbles exposed as the sand departed started to be of much interest. I rang a neighbor, Steve Maitland Thomas to ask him if he would come with me to take a look. We were down there together on January 19th for some hours in a brisk, cold wind.. And all of a sudden we started to see a series of barefoot human footprints in one of the lower, older peat deposits where the later layer of peat over it had peeled away exposing the layer below. There were adult prints, and those, half size of a child, at least 8 or 10 of them. It

was cold and the tide was coming in. We took some photos, assessed just where we were, in order to return, and left for home. The Museum staff were informed and so, a few days later we met Dr. Edith Evans from the Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust who brought a



colleague from the Museum with her, and we took them straight to the location concerned. On the way I was chatting to them about other footprints we had seen on earlier occasions, deer in large numbers, also cattle prints, and deer antlers in the peat had been found in some numbers, and how all that told us something about prehistoric conditions there. They soon confirmed not only that the prints were indeed prehistoric, they found some more that we had missed, and a few deer prints as well. They measured these prints, photographed them and used a position fixing instrument to pin-point the position on the map.

Subsequently Dr. Silvia Gonzales from John Moores University in Lancashire, who has specialised in prehistoric human footprints, visited the site, brought electronic three-dimensional scanning equipment and a generator to power it, to produce three-dimensional images for laboratory study out of the wind and weather. She told us that these human footprint sites, mostly on coasts or estuaries, only a few in Britain, 55 world-wide,

Presidential Amblings—June 2007

Few of us will have failed to enjoy the exceptionally unseasonable weather which brought a welcome touch of summer to April and the first week of May. Many plants and animals are as much as six weeks ahead of our "average" for this time of year. Local fields have already been harvested for the first crop of grass for animal fodder and the second is well on its way.

As always, CNS is well ahead of the field (excuse unintended pun!) and our forthcoming Meetings Programme for the 2007/08 year is already under preparation by Margaret and Patricia following a very productive planning meeting a few weeks ago. A large number of suggestions for both venues and activities were gratefully received from members, and the not inconsiderable (and sometimes frustrating) task of programme preparation is well under way. Sadly, Patricia who has been a really excellent Field Meetings Organiser for some years has told us that she will be leaving the area during the summer. She will be sadly missed. More on this later.

I am not sure whether, because of better communications, greater public interest in natural phenomena, or some other undefined cause, there has been reported in the news media more frequent incidents of sightings of unusual creatures. Pictorially terrifying creatures from the deep oceans such as the Colossal Squid, over 33 feet long and weighing half a ton; the very rare "prehistoric" Frilled Shark has recently been recorded after being captured alive in a fisherman's net. Nearer home we are told that Russian sturgeon are invading our local waters and squadrons of Asian Hornets are massing, set to cross the English Channel. Five legged frogs are apparently living peacefully in a river near Peterborough.

A number of interesting scientific discoveries have also been made recently - homing pigeons apparently have iron containing nerve tissues in their beaks thus enabling the use of navigational techniques previously poorly understood by scientists. Komodo dragons are able to reproduce at a time of male scarcity using parthenogenesis.

There are few subjects of greater interest than our ever increasing knowledge of the miraculous natural world around us.

Roger Milton

Field Meetings June to September 2007

Saturday June 30th
Start time 10.30am

Dinas Reserve
Packed lunch.

A trip to this mid Wales reserve to discover the beauty of Welsh woodlands with resident red kites, ravens and peregrines and summer-visiting pied flycatchers, redstarts, wood warblers and tree pipits.

A boardwalk trail goes through the oak wood and continues to the fast flowing river where dipper and grey wagtail may also to be seen. Some parts of the nature trail are rugged and steep. Meet at the visitors' carpark. RSPB members park free and a donation of £1 is requested from non – members. The reserve is located 10 miles north of Llandovey on the minor road to Llyn Brianne. (SN 788471)

Saturday July 14th
Start time 4.00pm.

Barbecue at Porthkerry CountryPark.

For this year's barbecue we are returning to Porthkerry Park, Barry. As usual please bring along food to cook at the barbecue. Please park at the main car park where there are also toilet facilities. The barbeque area is further down towards the beach on the left-hand side. Vehicles are not allowed down to the barbecue area so please remember this when organising your provisions although there should be helpers on the day. Wine and fruit juice will be provided.

Sunday August 5th.
Start time 10.30am.

Parc Cwm Darren.
Packed lunch.

Cwm Darren Park is a peaceful, picturesque country park set in the heart of the Darren Valley. There are a number of trails through woods, meadows and alongside the Ogilive Lake. The tranquil valley was once home to the Ogilive Colliery where coal was mined for 50 years. Please meet at the main car park and visitor centre. This is also the location of the Lakes Coffee Shop which also serves fantastic homemade cakes.

(SO 110034).

SOME FOOTPRINT, IN VRIETY, FROM LONG, LONG AGO By JOHN BLUNDELL

The stretch of sand beach between Sker point and the Kenfig river has always been of deep interest to me. Known variously as Sker beach, or Kenfig beach, depending most likely on the route used to reach it by the speaker, it has extensive sandy stretches where much of the sand is taken up into suspension on each tide in winter, a time of greater turbulence in the beach sea water, only to drop out again on the ebb out beyond the surf zone. And so it travels west on the tide only to start rolling in again, to the beach, from about mid March onwards in the calmer spring and summer conditions. So beach sand levels are at their highest at the end of October each year, and at their lowest in late winter. I have been walking there, or riding horses, each of the last 70 years or more, and so have had the opportunity regularly to observe just what goes on.

This last winter, due no doubt to global warming and a greater incidence and duration of gales conditions, and so of turbulence, far greater areas of under-sand strata have come to light than I have ever seen in a long life, exposing rock, other debris, and peat beds formed under fresh water conditions when sea levels were much lower, millennia ago. There is evidence of one or more interruptions in the peat growth, because of less benign conditions for the plants concerned, killed off by changes in temperature, or of rainfall, or possibly excess salt spray in the wind, leading to stratification. So tidal action can peel off the top layer of peat, exposing the earlier layer beneath. One winter in 1938 my late father and I were down there looking at some peat beds together, and he was explaining to me what fascinating areas these peat beds are, and much they can tell us about prehistoric conditions. Of course modern pollen analysis can tell us even more. He served on the Council of the National Museum and was always interesting to listen to on all aspects of the natural world about us. He explained to me that he had found deer antlers in the peat and flint arrow heads there also, and about sunken forests, glacial debris brought south, pebbles, gravel and larger boulders, by the melting ice that covered Britain long ago. And there are still oak tree stumps and fallen boughs here and there in the peat, proof of an oak forest and associate undergrowth, growing there at one time in the eastern sector of what is now Swansea Bay. Deer, cattle and horses, obvious prey for prehistoric hunter gatherers, had much to browse on, the first two left

Cardiff 'Out of the Woods Festival', Coopers Field, Bute Park
August 19th 2007.

A woodland event for all the family featuring woodland arts and crafts, nature trails, paddling your own coracle and many other fun activities. The 'Out of the Woods Festival' has grown in popularity over the years, and this year will host the international society of Arboriculture, Welsh Open Tree Climbing Competition. Locally crafted products will also be available and as an added bonus you can enjoy a leisurely home-made treat at the Hardwood Café. The event takes place from 10.30 am to 4.30 pm.

Once again Cardiff Naturalists' Society will have an exhibit at the festival and would welcome volunteers to help 'man' the stand for an hour or two, especially as the afternoon clashes with our second public walk of the year. Please contact any council members if you are able to help.

At the last Council meeting it was agreed that the Society would no longer accept the payment of annual subscription by Standing Order. Only 28 members pay in this way and with our change of Bank new orders would need to be set up.

Council has made this decision for two reasons. Firstly that despite the change of subscription three years ago a third of the Standing Orders still have not been updated. Secondly that these days we can claim Gift Aid relief on subscriptions even when paid by cheque or even cash.

Will all members affected please remember to CANCEL their existing Standing Order.

With thanks
Joan Andrews, Honorary Treasurer

COPY FOR SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER BY
17th AUGUST PLEASE. Ed

Sunday August 19th
Start time 2.30pm.

Lamby Way Lake.

For our second public walk we will be taking a stroll around the newly created lake next to the River Rumney. Unfortunately this event will be clashing with the Out of the Woods Festival at Bute Park so all members who could spare sometime during that day to support the walk will be most welcome. Meet at the entrance to the lake at the green gate at the bottom of Brachdy Lane, Rumney.

Saturday September 15th.
Start time 10.30am.

Leigh Woods.
Packed lunch.

On Bristol's doorstep, Leigh Woods offers wonderful views of the Avon Gorge, woodland sculptures and rare trees. The rare Wild Service Tree can be found here as well as the Bristol Whitebeam, found only in the Avon Gorge. The woods are largely broadleaved ancient woodland with some areas of conifers. It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, a Site of Nature Conservation Interest and a National Nature Reserve. Botanist and dendrologist, Tony Titchen will be guiding us around the site. Meet at the main car park on the A369, Portishead to Bristol road (ST 553741)

For all field trips it is expected that members will have read and agree to comply with the Field Meetings Safety Code.

It is always useful to know who is coming on the trip especially if you are willing to give a lift to those without transport. Please contact me if you need a lift and hopefully I can arrange one. Contributions towards drivers' petrol is appreciated.

Patricia Wood 20, Dryden Road, Penarth, CF64 2RT -
telephone 029 20701754.

Please note work number and Email address no longer current.

NOTES ON A FIELD MEETING WITH THE CARDIFF
NATURALISTS' SOCIETY AT PARC SLIP NATURE
PARK HELD ON SUNDAY 11 MARCH 2007.

Our visit took place on a pleasantly warm day with the sun breaking through a thin cloud cover. Our guide was Mike Clark, accompanied by Diana his wife. Mike knows the reserve intimately for he conducted species recording surveys here between 1997 and 2001 and has continued to monitor the reserve; he is also heavily involved in maintaining and conserving the habitats on the site. Mike has found many rarities in his surveys, especially amongst the Odonata, but at this time of the year we could not hope to see any of the 20 species of Dragonfly he has found here or, indeed, the profusion of flowering plants. Instead we were to have a succession of highlights (which I think is a typical and appealing aspect of nature walks in this country).

According to the new and excellent Nature Reserves Handbook produced by the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales, the reserve covers 124.9 hectares (308.4 acres) which makes it their second biggest single reserve, beaten only by Skomer Island. The reserve itself is surprisingly diverse considering that it was once the site of an opencast coal mine and attendant coal tips. There is now a variety of grassland (both improved and unimproved), mixed woodland, wetlands, a canal, numerous ponds and a lake. We could not hope to explore every part in detail but Mike had devised a route which took in some of the best spots. These were along easily walked paths largely around the edges of the reserve.

The reserve is divided by the north to south running Fountains Road into two parts.

The Western Part.

We left the Parc Slip Visitor Centre near the first pond, known as Park Pond. This was purchased by the Trust as long ago as December 1977 so was part of the original reserve. A variety of wildlife has appeared within its confines, including Brown Trout and Dragonfly species, but it also provides an important pond dipping facility for children.

We followed a tarmac track westwards between well-laid Hawthorn hedging. Overhead, we could hear Skylarks. At our feet, there were few flowers to be seen as yet. However, we did pass one of the 8 species of

NEWS FROM CARDIFF BIODIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

I represented CNS at a meeting of the Partnership on 1st May at Forest Farm. An attractive leaflet about the Country Park there is now available – phone 02920 445900 for details. A larger booklet about Biodiversity in Cardiff is in preparation for a launch in the autumn.

Ideas for wildlife-enhancing projects in the city are welcome. Peregrines are using the old Raven's nest on the City Hall clock tower this year. A viewing station behind the building will be manned at times by the RSPB and nest pictures transmitted into the National Museum.

We listened to presentations from Sergeant Ian Guildford about reporting Wildlife Crime and from Ruth Mumford about **Cardiff in Bloom**.

A new category of the latter this year is for a **Wildlife Garden**. The judges will be looking for features designed to encourage birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles and all kinds of mini-beasts by providing food, water and shelter as well as using native plants. The competition is free to enter and there are prizes. I'm sure CNS members who live in Cardiff must have just the sort of gardens that would do well – why not have a go. The closing date for entries is 6th July and judging will take place 16-27th July. Details are available at www.cardiff.gov.uk/bloom.

Wales Biodiversity Week starts on Saturday 9th June with a Fete of the Earth in The Hayes and continues until Sunday 17th June when there is a Wildlife Weekend at St. Fagans Museum. There are various events on most days including our own CNS-led Orchid Walk at Coryton M4 junction at 7pm on Wednesday 13th June. Posters around the city will show the whole programme of events to which all are welcome. Full details also available at www.cardiff.gov.uk/biodiversity or phone 02920 873268.

Linda Nottage

that this would attract them back. He went across to explore and was really pleased to be able to report the sighting of one female Adder. Hopefully she will be the start of recolonization.

We continued along the track and kept a lookout for Woodpeckers. The reserve is excellent for Green Woodpeckers and it was a surprise that we had neither seen nor heard one. There was also the possibility of seeing the elusive Lesser Spotted Woodpecker but alas this was not to be. Even 3 male Brimstones failed to make up for this. The track eventually brought us to the eastern edge of the reserve and the small Aberkenfig Pond. It was too early in the year for anything of note to be seen but Mike did startle us with the information that Sea Trout have made their way here via an outlet sluice at the bottom which takes water into the river network. Away to the east beyond the reserve could be seen one aspect for future concern, namely, the first signs of a housing development.

We retraced our steps back along the track until a convenient path, with a crossing over the stream, enabled us to climb steadily northwards through woodland, mainly of Larch and Alder, both rather attractive in their catkins, and with stands of Lodgepole Pine and some flowering Blackthorn. We spotted a clump of Bluebell leaves but this was not an occasion for pleasure because their large size meant that they were sure to be Spanish Bluebell. The spot was noted by Mike so that they could be removed later and so prevent hybridization with the native species. In a sunlit grassy patch a Comma was seen looking lovely in its brighter first brood, golden form called "huchinsoni". This was also a good time to look skywards in time to see 6 Buzzards circling above. Mike mentioned that the Larch and Pine woods here are extremely good for fungi, especially Russula and Boletes species. Some rare ones have been found and probably came with the trees when planted. We were now circling back to the Fountains Road by the Visitor Centre. One final pleasure found on a verge along the final approach to the road was our final basking Adder - perhaps not in the best of spots at what was now a frequent dog walking track!

We were all grateful to Mike and Diane for their time and expertise. This had given the chance to see things which add up to make any nature walk something special.

JOHN DAWES

Orchid found on the reserve - although only by virtue of a set of Common Spotted Orchid leaves poking through the tarmac! [The Handbook mentions that there are 7 species of Orchid but Mike mentioned that a new one, the Pyramidal Orchid, was found last year for the first time. There would be 9 species if a single Green-winged Orchid would kindly re-emerge after a gap of 4 or so years!]. Apart from the flowering Gorse, present beyond the hedge, and the differing yellows of Primroses and Colt's-foot, I particularly liked the soft golden-yellow catkins on groups of Willow shoots. I confess that I have always referred to these as "Pussy Willows" in the belief that this was the actual species of Willow. Research (especially in Richard Mabey's Flora Britannica) has revealed that this is not the case and that the term "pussy willows" actually refers to the male catkin buds. These are silky and silver grey before becoming the brilliant golden yellow as seen on this part of our walk. They belong to the Goat Willow, one of 5 species of Willow found on the reserve.

The track eventually led to a large scrape known as the the Northern Wetlands. This is an extensive area of reed fringed water with an island in its centre. There is an excellent bird hide at the end of the track. This gave a good view of the lake and allowed us to see;

- > Several Goosanders - Mike said that they occur in greater numbers here than at Kenfig Pool and are attracted by the clean water. Both males and females were seen, the latter with their attractive red-brown heads.
- > One solitary Heron
- > Several Coot
- > Several Little Grebe, one of which amused by dashing across the island to reach new water
- > Several pairs of Teal, the males looking really handsome
- > Some Moorhens
- > Several pairs of Tufted Ducks
- > Some Mallards.

We left the pleasures of the hide and proceeded south by means of other tarmac tracks. We passed an open pasture on our right, which is to be managed for Lapwings, although one problem will be probable Fox and Corvid predation. We continued to another large scrape called the Waderscrape. This reed-fringed lake and its small islands were designed with waders in mind. In this it has been partially successful and Lapwings have successfully bred chicks. Unfortunately, the scrape has been easily penetrated by predators and heavy Fox and Corvid predation has meant that no chicks survived last year. In addition there is a lack of cover and one repercussion is that there are no longer any Snipe around the edges of the scrape. Mike felt that it was not therefore fulfilling its aim as far as birds were concerned. As if to bear this out we entered the hide and I only

saw one scurrying Coot. By way of compensation the scrape is good for Dragonflies and Mike mentioned that he has established that the localized Hairy Dragonfly breeds here. The verges by the track leading to the hide were also covered in a multitude of Primroses. They were large flowered and vigorous and there is a suspicion that an original plant was brought in and has spread.

We continued along the track from the hide and past a bank on our left topped with some low, thin Hawthorn. The other side of the bank faces south and forms a linear reserve within the main reserve. The Small Blue Butterfly breeds only here within the reserve and lays its eggs on the available Kidney Vetch flowers. The track next passed over the Nant y Gedd stream and, just beyond, we turned left, through a gate and onto a path that dropped pleasantly down to the southern edge of the reserve. We had the sound of the stream to our left, as it trickled noisily downhill. On our right was a well laid Hawthorn hedge and on either side were trees and shrubs including Gorse, Willows and Alder. At the end we emerged onto a patch of bare ground with a small reed bed beyond, a small pond by a bridge, and a tarmac track. The bare ground is good for Butterflies, including the Dingy Skipper. This is also where several Pyramidal Orchids were found last year.

The small Nant y Gedd pond rarely dries up and is where Mike has seen the rare Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly. The tarmac track forms part of Route 4 of the National Cycle Track and we turned left along it so as to proceed eastwards through the bottom of the reserve. Soon, to our left, was an unprepossessing bank with areas of Bracken and surmounted by trees such as Alder and Pine (? Lodgepole Pine). Mike had brought us here confident that we would see Adders and, possibly, Grass Snakes. He did not let us down! In a short stretch of this south facing bank we spotted 6 basking Adders. As far as Mike was concerned each was in its expected territory and he knew them by sight and had given individual descriptive names such as Diamondback, Golden Girl and Olive. The snakes we saw had recently emerged from hibernation and were somewhat sluggish. They stayed where they were provided we approached carefully and this gave us the opportunity to examine them closely and for photographs to be taken. Mike explained that they are at their most vulnerable at this time of year. The body colours were dull and this is an indication that they will soon be shedding their skin in the process known as "sloughing". An advantage of this process is that it disposes of the dirt and parasites held on the skin as well as giving a new brighter appearance. It begins with the build up of a

separating fluid. The removal of the old skin then starts at the head and proceeds down the body by a process of unrolling. The result is a "slough" which is colourless and opaque and can be in one piece. It is also inside out and careful examination is needed to reveal the previous whereabouts of the eyes and the scale arrangements. We were all privileged to see the Adders but several were also lucky enough to catch a glimpse of a Common Lizard and then, separately, an immature Grass Snake. The latter soon slid away once disturbed. The other highlights of this stretch of linear reserve within the reserve were a couple of male Brimstone Butterflies patrolling up and down the track in their search for the paler almost white females, which are likely to be hidden amongst tree leaves. Another colourful sighting was of a collection of bright scarlet fungi on a fallen branch. They were the aptly named Scarlet Elf Cap.

We stopped for lunch at a monument just off the main path. A circular wall gave seating around a cairn incorporating 112 large stones. A notice board recorded that this was in memory of the 112 men and boys who lost their lives in the nearby Parc Slip Colliery Deep Mine after an explosion at 8.30 a.m. on the 26th of August 1892.

The Eastern Part.

After lunch some of us ventured with Mike eastwards along the tarmac track until it reached Fountains Road. We then turned south towards the Fountains Restaurant and crossed into the eastern part of the reserve on a track running above and parallel with a little used railway line. The track was muddier than before but quite walkable. Our first stopping point was at Fountain Pond. There is no enclosed bird hide here but from a shuttered fence we were briefly able to check for any birds and saw two Mute Swans on a raised nest, and some Tufted Ducks, Moorhens and Coots. Just beyond, by a grassy bank, Mike produced as by magic a pair of Toads in their mating embrace. Careful handling ensured that the loving couple remained together! At the base of the bank he then conjured forth the final instar stage of a female Glow-worm. She had a segmented abdomen, is wingless and is ready to emit a light at night from the final 3 segments and so attract a male. This is a particularly good spot to come and see this display. We moved on between mature plantations of Larch and Alder and with a stream to our left. A stretch of bank on the far side of the stream used to be the best site for Adders with some 20 or so being present each year and plenty of Voles as prey. However it had become overgrown with too much Bramble and trees and the heavy shade did not suit the Adders at all. Mike had therefore opened up a small clearing last year in the hope