

FUNGI WALK and WORKSHOP at DANCERSEND on Saturday November 2nd 2019

Penny Cullington

Today's event was a trial run for a new format planned at our AGM back in June. After a shortened walk on this well-recorded Reserve the 10 members who'd booked places for the workshop were to return to the Waterworks buildings kindly provided by warden and member



Mick Jones for the remainder of the day. The weather played its part in our plans, however, and not only were numbers attending just the walk considerably reduced by the forecast high winds and rain but soon after 11.00 we'd all had enough (and had also collected enough) so we gratefully retreated to the shelter of the buildings where scopes and books had been set up in readiness.

Left, the group with Penny attempting to take a photo of *Cortinarius osmophorus*, a rare species found fruiting at this particular spot last year and kindly obliging today. (MJ)

Warm drinks and biscuits were handed round whilst our somewhat soggy specimens were roughly laid out though nothing was being named at this stage (nor during the walk): Derek and I were deliberately playing it close to our chests to encourage attendees to attempt to determine to genus even if not to species.

Right, our specimen table gradually filling up with the morning's finds. (MJ)



After a brief chat from me about the importance played by spore colour in determining to genus and how to take a sporeprint, we divided roughly into two groups and with the aid of scopes (and in Derek's case supplemented by a large monitor screen linked to his equipment) he and I started showing examples of spores and cystidia, talking about when stains and chemicals were necessary, and demonstrating techniques of preparing a slide with a dissecting microscope before viewing with a compound microscope. It was not long before it was time for attendees to have a go for themselves at slicing off a gill edge ready for staining, squashing and viewing, using either their own scopes or those generously provided by Julia Carey at BMERK for the day. This being a skill which takes considerable practice, it not surprisingly took time and several attempts to achieve successfully but by the end of the session all those who tried were getting quite good results. I

think everyone found it hard to take on board just how infinitesimal a strip from the gill is needed for success: it's definitely a case of 'less is more' and 'if you can see it with the naked eye it's too big'!



Above, Derek and Penny expounding (MJ)

A break for packed lunches provided diversion at one point when Robert noticed that some of the foil wrapping round my sandwiches had been shredded into bits onto the bread. Further investigation revealed some suspiciously large holes and putting two and two together, I enquired of Mick if there could be mice in the building. Sure enough there were, and checking in my bag where the sandwiches had spent the morning, I found the culprit was still in there having been unable to escape! Our furry friend was then gently but firmly tipped into a hedge outside by Claudi!

We'd provided a good selection of specialist books and keys and spent time in the afternoon trying to work through a few keys, explaining some of the terminology used in descriptions and discovering the pitfalls such as having to decide between extremely similar spore sizes sometimes given in the couplets in keys. We packed up soon after 4.00 and everyone seemed to have thoroughly enjoyed this brief sortie into the world of mycology with scopes. Some were even enthused to do more of it and we will definitely try to include another similar event here next year, though maybe a bit earlier in the season to avoid the colder conditions and thick leaf deposit which made finding fungi quite a challenge today.

Thank you to all attendees for coming and particularly to Mick for making us so welcome and laying on refreshments, also to Julia from BMERK for the generous loaning of scopes and books. There follow a few more photos, thanks to Mick and Justin, to give a flavour of the day.





Above, the amazingly vibrant (and smelly) specimen of *Tricholoma sulphureum* on our display table (JL)



In contrast, the equally amazing and vibrant *Chlorociboria aeruginascens* also on the table today (JL)