

Foray at Penn Wood on Sunday November 1st

Penny Cullington

Today we had our largest group of forayers yet this season: probably in the region of 75 attendees, the vast majority of whom were friends of Jackie Mackenzie-Dodds and Justin Warhurst who kindly organised the event – one which was originally their private foray but for the last three years has been joint with BFG and the Woodland Trust, the owners of Penn Wood. We met at 1.00 and were blessed yet again with a beautiful day. After brief introductions we divided up into three groups, each with a leader – guest celebrity and TV presenter Richard Fortey, Derek and myself, and set off to our assigned separate areas to enable us to cover as much as possible of this large piece of ancient woodland together with areas of unimproved grassland.



Richard's group about to set off into the woodland. (JW)

Derek's group started in the churchyard where the unimproved grass and few conifers produced their usual array of interesting and quite rare species. One such is an unusual Ascomycete (spore-shooter) which we've recorded here for quite a few years: not a cup fungus as such but one with a stem which widens into a flattened 'spoonlike' head. Not rare in Scotland but not at all common this far south, *Spathularia flavida* (Yellow fan) favours coniferous litter in acid areas, and here it seems to thrive in grass but near the large Lawson's cypress. As it happens, the Penn area is a small pocket of acid soil in a predominantly calcareous part of the country (thus the Woodland Trust's struggle to keep the *Rhododendron ponticum* under control here).



Spathularia flavida in the churchyard (PC)

Another late season species which often grows in the churchyard is the distinctive *Pseudoclitocybe cyathiformis* (what a mouthful of a name, but its common English name makes up for it, being short and to the point: The Goblet). This was found here today as well.



The grassland areas proved very productive as they often do here at this end of the season, and our longish species list includes a good selection of waxcaps, clubs, grassland *Mycenas* (Bonnets) and the like. We visited Penn a few weeks back and my report for that foray includes a photo of a good selection of different waxcap species, also one of the stunning deep red *Hygrocybe coccinea* (Scarlet waxcap), but it wouldn't feel right to have a report on Penn without at least one waxcap photo, so with apologies for the repeat here is that same species again – it happens to be the only waxcap photo taken on the day.

Left: *Pseudoclitocybe cyathiformis* and below *Hygrocybe coccinea*, both found in the churchyard today. (JW)

Another grassland species we found, this one on the cricket pitch, is not so distinctive to look at with its dry grey cap and white gills but has a strong mealy smell (of flour). This was *Dermoloma cuneifolium* (Crazed cap).



Left: *Dermoloma cuneifolium* – this photo taken on our previous foray here on October 11th (DJS). Below: *Mycena flavoalba* (Ivory Bonnet) another rather inconspicuous grassland species we found today, with caps only about 1cm across (the photo was taken on Brill common in 2012 – PC)

In the woodland itself fungi were not so plentiful and also were often quite hard to locate due to the liberal covering of fallen leaves. Nevertheless we collected between us an amazing 110 different species, of which 6 were new to the site and a couple turned out to be rarities. Few photos were taken as we were so busy searching, but here are a couple worth including.





Above left: the brackets of the unusual *Gloeophyllum sepiarium* (Conifer mazegill) – a common species in the north but not often found this far south. Above right: *Coprinellus micaceus* (Glistening inkcap) fruiting on a rotting deciduous log. (JW)



I wonder if Daisy had the book open on the correct page to identify the clusters of *Hypholoma fasciculare* (Sulphur tuft) seen at her feet? A budding mycologist in the making! (JW)

The two rarities I mentioned were both collected by Richard and both were species of *Inocybe* (Fibre cap) - a challenging genus and one that I particularly enjoy. One of these he handed me afterwards and I took home to work on (very few of the genus can safely be identified in the field), and after much brain-searching the closest I could get to a name was *I. cf. glabrescens* (the cf. indicating that it was not a perfect fit thus the determination is not definitive). There are extremely few British records of this poorly known species. The second rarity Richard took home to work on, only to discover once under the microscope that it was yet another species of *Inocybe*! In the field this genus is quite often extremely easy to confuse with other similar LBJs (little brown jobs), and no shame should be felt by anyone, however experienced, when this happens. I've made a special study of *Inocybe* for years and still make errors of

this nature, so when Richard found that his singleton dark brown specimen with a cap no more than 1cm across, a long dark stem and rusty gills had the tell-tale microscopic features of the genus, he wished he'd recognised it for what it was and given it to me earlier. As it happened, when he described the microscopic features to me by email I was able to name it because it is one of only two of the 140 known British species of *Inocybe* which has two-spored basidia. He dried the specimen and sent it to me and I am quite confident that this is *I. fuscidula* var. *bisporigera*, and as such is again extremely rare. No photos of either specimen today, but as we have no other examples of microscopic features for today's report I thought I'd include a photo to demonstrate a two-spored



basidium. This is from a species of *Conocybe* and to give an idea of scale the spores which are still attached to the two spikes on the top of the basidium are about 10 microns high. Mushrooms and their allies are classed as Basidiomycetes because they all produce their spores on cells found on the gill called basidia, and the vast majority of species have basidia with four spikes (sterigmata), each of which develops an individual spore. Thus finding basidia with only two sterigmata is always very significant and useful for identification purposes.

Left: an example of a two-spored basidium magnified x 1000. (PC)

The three groups met up in the village hall after the foray and while cups of tea were distributed we set up a display of our finds, followed by an informative and amusing ‘Show and tell’ session from Richard with a few interjections from Derek and myself.



The display, with Richard, Penny and Derek expounding (JW)

The grand total for the day was 135 species (see the separate list for more details of what we found), and everyone was then cordially invited back to Jackie and Justin's house in Amersham for the final session of what turned out to be an amazing and very enjoyable day. What has now become the traditional fare for this occasion – the amazing and splendid cake with a strong fungus theme – did not disappoint as can be seen below, in fact it was the best yet and here makes a fitting conclusion to my report of this memorable occasion.

My thanks to all who attended, searched for fungi so efficiently today and made the day so successful, also to Justin for his admirable photos without which this report would not have been possible.



The pièce de resistance brilliantly made by Joan Warlow. (JW)

Photos: DJS = Derek Schafer, JW = Justin Warhurst, PC = Penny Cullington

PS I received more photos of this event after having finished the above report which I thought were well worth including, so I've added them on the next page. My thanks to Nick White for sharing them with us.



Richard's hand in the process of puffing a puffball, with the cloud of spores beautifully in focus! (NW)

