March 1980

P.S.N.S.

BOTANICAL SECTION

Bulletin Number 4

INTRODUCTION

This Bulletin includes accounts of the 1979 excursions not covered in the last issue. It also includes a most interesting and humourously informative article by a new member, Mr. John Rohrbach M.Vet.Med.,M.R.C.V.S. Finally an appeal to assist in an "Operation Snowdrop" to provide a more accurate picture of distribution for the next issue of the Atlas.

EXCURSIONS 1979 continued

Cam Creag (NN/5--4--NE Quadrant) 22.7.79
Leader: John Winham

I was not present at this meeting but provide the following report. John writes "-- we seem to have had a good haul despite the cliffs being quartzite and rather dull". Nevertheless, 201 species were recorded on a BSBI card adding to our mountain records in an area not previously very well worked. The number of alpines was limited compared with richer mountains but included *Athyrium distentifolium* (Alpine Lady's Fern), *Juncus trifidus* and *J. triglumis* (Three-leaved and Three flowered Rush), *Loiseleria procumbens* (Mountain Azalea) the rare grass *Melica nutans, Sibbaldia procumbens, Tofielda pusilla* (Scottish Asphodel) etc. The moorland Petty Whin, Field Gentian, Cranberry, One-sided Wintergreen, Bog Whortleberry, and Cloudberry must have provided pleasure. He further writes that "The critical species have been named by Olga Stewart who attended the meeting. The hybrid (Orchid) *Gymnadenia X Pseudorichis (=X Pseudodenia schweinfurthii)* was drawn by Olga and florets sent off to Kew where the determination was made. The *Sagina X normanniana* (a Pearlwort) seemed O K but Richard Thomas sent off a piece for confirmation. All in all a very enjoyable day with three PSNS members joining us."

Apparently there was an abundance of the Dwarf Birch *(Betula nana)* which is rather locally distributed, and one of the few purely Scottish shrubs in the British Isles.

A.W. Robson

DALCRUE (No/044279) 7.8.79

This joint meeting with the Geological Section was attended by a dozen members - though geologists were decidedly thin on the ground! A Permo-Carboniferous dolerite dyke cuts vertically through the Lower Old Red Sandstone rocks at Dalcrue Bridge. The party examined the structures in the sandstone beds and noted the effects of heat from the dyke on the adjacent rocks. The woodlands downstream of Dalcrue Bridge were then examined by the botanists until dusk.

Michael Taylor

HAREMYRE (No/18-42-) 11.8.79

A small party of the Section visited Haremyre and Stormont Loch, the main object being to determine whether further work clearing Raspberry, Bramble and other heavy growth required to be done in the area fenced off for protection. Previous work had been done by Section members between 1966 and 1973 and the effectiveness of this was evident in the considerable spread of *Linnaea borealis*. The party were delighted to find *Goodyera repens* (Creeping Ladies' Tresses) also within the protected area. Beside the path to the lochside two fine stands of *Gnaphalium sylvaticum* (Wood Cudweed), not previously recorded, were found here. Afterwards a walk to Stormont Loch revealed a considerable quantity of *Goodyera* flourishing. Some study of grasses during the afternoon, including the distinction between Wood Soft-grass and Yorkshire Fog, was incidental as was also the characteristics of fine specimens of *Cupressus lawsoniana* and *Thuja plicata*, often confused. Both of these were found naturally regenerating.

It was decided that no immediate clearing work in the protected area at Haremyre was required.

Rhoda Fothergill

The "Milk-white flower of the snows"

Snowdrops are here again! - always a welcome sight. The title is a free translation of the botanical name - *Galanthus nivalis*. This European plant, believed native in parts of Wales and W. England, is so thoroughly naturalised over most of Britain that it has been recorded as a naturalised wilding in the B.S.B.I. Atlas (1962). However, only eight 10 km squares show occurences in Perthshire as e.g. 18 in the Lothians. Under-recording is the result, mainly of operating summer outings when its leaves are not so easily noticed among the burgeoning greenery.

I would welcome the following data from any member either this or next season. (Retain until you have a list, if you like, to save postage):-

1. Date, Locality (ie. a name on an O.S. Map easily found, Your name
2. Habitat. As there seem to be 3 main habitat types, it would be helpful to use the abbreviations as follows:
   OE - Old Estates (usually woodland)
   RV - Road Verges. If near habitations add nH.
   R - Riverbanks.
3. Quantity Use one of three symbols for quantity in brackets. (ab) - abundant.
   (m) - many plants (more than 10)
   (f) - few plants (1 to c.10).
   Use (m) or (f) whether you consider these represent a single clone or not.

   Examples: 02/80 Dupplin. A.W. Robson. OE.(ab)- RV.nH (m)

   02/80 Machany nr. Muthil. A.W. Robson. RV. (f)

A.W. Robson,
Towerview,
DUNNING,
Perth PH2 ORT

FRANCIS BUCHANAN WHITE (1842-94)

Members of the Section may know that I am compiling information about F.B.W. and am searching for any surviving correspondence, notes etc. If any members have any information about Dr White would they please let me know?

I would also be pleased to hear any anecdotes about Dr White or any other of the many naturalists who were members of PSNS.

Michael Taylor
Perth Museum & Art Gallery

THE ELUSIVE YELLOW DOCK

Known to botanists as *Rumex crispus* or the Curled Dock this should be easy enough to find in most parts of Britain, including Perthshire. It is described in Keble Martin's 'Concise British Flora' as common, and in 'The Handbook of British Flora' by Bentham and Hooker as abundant, being found on roadsides, in ditches, pastures and waste places throughout Europe and Russian Asia, except the extreme north.

Why, the reader may well be asking, should anyone wish to find such a common dock? The clue to the answer lies in the heading wherein this plant is described as the Yellow Dock, that being the name by which Medical Herbalists have known this plant for some time. The root is used either fresh or dried or liquid extracts made from the root. It is a gentle laxative acting on the small intestine by increasing the bile flow and also stimulating activity of the large bowel. It is also a mild tonic and astringent. It has been used to treat a variety of conditions but perhaps particularly it is useful for treating chronic skin disease and perhaps also rheumatism.

I had been using herbal remedies for some years before moving to Comrie in 1975 but had, until then, used preparations sold by pharmaceutical firms specialising in these remedies. It had been my intention to start making extracts myself both from plants harvested in the wild and from those grown in the garden here. *R. crispus* was on the

initial short list and although my practical botany was not very expert I had not anticipated any difficulty in finding it. However, as so often happens, the event bore little similarity to the anticipation and the Curled Dock was not to be found in preliminary searches.

I was fortunate in the winter of 1975-76 to meet Allan Robson and sought guidance for the location of several plants, but was treated to a kindly and tolerant smile when I asked where to find this one. The summers of 1976 and 1977 included periodical searches with no success, though by this time I had become familiar enough with docks to recognise most of those which I found as *R. obtusifolius* and its hybrids. Some preliminary research was started with this plant using the senses to start with, looking at the colour of the root, and smelling and tasting and trying it on myself. It was found that some of the roots were yellow and had the properties described above, and other roots were a very pale yellow-to-white and were without these properties. Feeling perhaps a little guilty that I had not sorted out the plant which had been described in so many old herbals and obviously used for centuries I commenced making extracts of *R. obtusifolius* and using these with marked success.

In the back end of 1978 I was driving through Dunning, after a visit to another herbalist whom I had been able to supply with some seeds and plants. Returning with other seeds and plants to fill in some gaps in my repertoire, but not including the elusive root, I remembered that here I was in the home town of the Perthshire botanist, but on that occasion I could not recall his name. So I stopped in the village and opened the car window and addressed a query to a young man there, describing the man whom I sought. He said my description fitted his father, and his father proved to be the man! From his convalescent armchair he directed me on a round journey on which he assured me that I would find enough *R. crispus* to treat not only the animals in my care but every person and animal in the British Isles. A hour later I returned with many specimens of *R. obtusifolius*. The B.S.B.I. Atlas did not indicate any likelihood of shortage of *R. crispus* in Perthshire below 1500', but we were not to find it.

The saga draws towards its close, at least it seems to for this phase. In the summer of 1979 a triumphant Robson telephoned with the news that *R. crispus* grew and flourished in one or two areas of a large building site near Gleneagles. Armed with directions and a six-figure map reference I departed thither and emerged triumphant with the trophy.

The lesson that seems to be learnt from this, at least the botanical lesson, is that we should not assume that plants that have been common in the past are necessarily common now. There have been many changes in agriculture, particularly the use of chemical weedkillers and it may be that these are having more effect on *R. crispus* than on *R. obtusifolius*. It seems likely that the plants that were found growing near Gleneagles had germinated from dormant seeds exposed by the deep disturbance necessary for the building works.

There are two small postscripts to the tale. The first is that *R. crispus* of the maritime variety was also found in 1979 by the author while on holiday in Sutherland. It was found on the edge of a sea loch. The second postscript is that a herbal textbook read in the latter part of 1979 describes *R. obtusifolius* as having similar properties to *R. crispus*. This is in fact the first time I have seen this information in any book.

John A Rohrbach

Produced by Perth Museum & Art Gallery