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Society members by cotton grass

Belstone Botanical Walk

by Bill Murray

On Saturday 16 July, when the Met Office had just issued a red warning for severely hot temperatures, 15 members and friends set out from Belstone Village Hall car park to search for the wildflowers and grasses that were recorded in a botanical survey and published in The North Devon Journal on 13 July 1905.

The details of the original survey appeared on Tim Sandles' Legendary Dartmoor Facebook page in 2021. Our mission was to retrace the route of the 1905 walkers and to compare the results of their survey with what we could find. It was an opportunity not to be missed.

The 1905 group set out from Okehampton Station and walked to Belstone, then to Belstone Tor and down to Cullever Steps.

From here they progressed to the clapper bridge known as New Bridge - which has a double passage over the Black-a-ven Brook - and up to the heights of High Willhays. The return journey to Okehampton Station was made by way of Yes Tor, Red-a-ven Brook, Moor Brook and Fitz Well.

It would have been nice to follow the same path but our guide, Liz Miall, advised me at the

planning stage that the distance would be too far on what might be a very hot July day.

At about the same time, by good fortune I heard that Andrew Terry in Belstone had been recording the wildflowers on Belstone Common for several years. We met and decided to concentrate our efforts on Belstone Common and the Duchy lands around East Okement Farm.

Setting off at 9.30am, we walked out of the village to Watchet Hill where there is a boggy area on the edge of the moor. In addition to Andrew Terry, our party included several very knowledgeable botanists and we found here several species of wildflowers including lousewort, ivy-leaved bellflower and sundew. Andrew pointed out the leaves of pale butterwort, which was no longer in flower; later in the walk, some eagle-eyed members of our group also found flowering plants.

We continued along the Knack Mine track, spotting tiny flowers in the broken gravel while passing Cullever Steps and walking on to the river crossing at Henry's Ford, beyond East Okement Farm. Here there is another boggy area, known to local people as Skit Bottom, where we found several plants including marsh St John's wort,

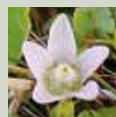
bog asphodel, bogbean and hare's tail cotton-grass.

We climbed the hill behind the farm to Hut 22 on the military ring road and then descended to Cullever Steps where we had our picnic lunches. Yes, it was very hot weather but there was a breeze and shade from the trees by the side of the stream and everyone felt comfortable.

Walking back to Belstone past Scarey Tor and along the Cullever track, one looks down on the East Okement River below. There are several boggy patches that feed the river and here we found some different wildflowers, including thyme, eyebright, self-heal, ivy-leaved crowfoot and common butterwort (not in flower), arriving back at the Belstone car park at 4pm.

In all we found 39 different flowers and seven grasses. I have compiled the following list to the best of my ability and with a lot of help from Andrew Terry. He has since told me that the forget-me-not we saw may have been the creeping variety (*Myosotis secunda*). My Devonshire reply was 'My! So 'tis'.

On parting company, I thanked Andrew Terry for sharing his expertise with us on what was a lovely eight-mile walk in a very special part of Dartmoor.



Species found

Species that were recorded on the 1905 survey are in **bold print**. Botanical names are correct and not necessarily the same as in 1905.

Wild Flowers

Asphodel	Bog	<i>Narthecium ossifragum</i>
Bedstraw	Heath	<i>Galium saxatile</i>
Bedstraw	Common Marsh	<i>Galium palustre</i>
Bell Flower	Ivy-leaved	<i>Hesperocodon hederaceus</i>
Bell Heather		<i>Erica cinerea</i>
Bogbean		<i>Menyanthes trifoliata</i>
Butterwort	Common	<i>Pinguicula vulgaris</i>
Butterwort	Pale	<i>Pinguicula lusitanica</i>
Crowfoot	Round-leaved	<i>Ranunculus omiophyllus</i>
Eyebright		<i>Euphrasia officinalis</i>
Forget-me-not	Water	<i>Myosotis scorpioides</i>
Foxglove		<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>
Hawkbitt	Lesser	<i>Leontodon saxatilis</i>
Hawkweed	Mouse-ear	<i>Pilosella officinarum</i>
Heath	Cross-leaved	<i>Erica tetralix</i>
Herb Robert		<i>Geranium robertianum</i>
Lousewort		<i>Pedicularis sylvatica</i>
Milkwort	Heath	<i>Polygala serpyllifolia</i>
Mint	Water	<i>Mentha aquatica</i>
Nightshade	Enchanters	<i>Circaea lutetiana</i>
Orchid	Heath spotted	<i>Dactylorhiza maculata</i>
Pearlwort	Heath	<i>Sagina subulata</i>
Pennywort	Marsh	<i>Hydrocotyle vulgaris</i>
Pimpernel	Bog	<i>Anagallis tenella</i>
Self-heal		<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>
Sheepsbit		<i>Jasione montana</i>



Spearwort	Lesser	<i>Ranunculus flammula</i>
Spurrey	Red or Sand	<i>Spergularia rubra</i>
St Johns Wort	Marsh	<i>Hypericum elodes</i>
Sundew	Round-leaved	<i>Drosera rotundifolia</i>
Thistle	Marsh	<i>Cirsium palustre</i>
Thyme	Wild	<i>Thymus polytrichus</i>
Trefoil	Birdsfoot	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>
Violet	Marsh	<i>Viola palustris</i>
Water Pepper		<i>Persicaria hydropiper</i>
Willow-herb	Broadleaved	<i>Epilobium montanum</i>
Yarrow		<i>Achillea millefolium</i>

Introduced Species (very near to Belstone Village)

Monkey Flower	<i>Mimulus guttatus</i>
Himalayan Balsam	<i>Impatiens glandulifera</i>

Species on 1905 Survey but not found on 2022 Survey

Groundsel	Mountain	<i>Senecio sylvaticus</i>
Speedwell	Marsh	<i>Veronica scutellata</i>
Birdsfoot	Small	<i>Ornithopus perpusillus</i>

Reeds and Grasses

Cotton-grass	Common	<i>Eriophorum angustifolium</i>
Cotton-grass	Hare's Tail	<i>Eriophorum vaginatum</i>
Horsetail	Marsh	<i>Equisetum palustre</i>
Rush	Bulbous	<i>Juncus bulbosus</i>
Rush	Hard	<i>Juncus inflexus</i>
Rush	Heath	<i>Juncus squarrosus</i>
Sedge	Green-ribbed	<i>Carex binervis</i>