

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

All our profits are donated to The Wildlife Trusts



ISLES OF SCILLY

5th-9th & 9th-13th May 2009

TRIP REPORT



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Leaders

Rosemary Parslow: Truro, Cornwall

Clare Roper: Gunnislake, Cornwall

Throughout both trips the weather was relatively kind, there was some sunshine each day and only a slight shower of rain. At times the days started overcast, but almost always brightened later. On the final day the sea fog rolled in threatening the departure of the final group, but fortunately all got away before flying stopped for the day. Some days strong winds produced choppy seas so that we had to change our plans when there were no boats to the island we planned to visit. Some idea on how rough it was indicated by the failure of RMV *Scillionian* to sail on one day, and cancellation of the gig races.

5 May Arrival

Claire met up with Group 1 at Penzance Airport to catch the helicopter to St Mary's. The Group consisted of fifteen people, twelve from Lakeland and three independent travellers. Rosemary had already arrived in St Mary's on the Scillionian and had discussed arrangements with Melanie Woodcock at Lyonesse Guest House. When they all arrived on the airport bus Claire took three ladies to Anjeric G H next door & Rosemary escorted the rest to the lounge for a brief introduction while the luggage was taken to rooms. Due to the late arrival dinner had been moved to a later time and was followed by a briefing on the islands and their interest, proposed programme plans for the holiday and safety issues.

6 May Tresco

After breakfast everyone met outside on Holgate's Green. Sandwiches were bought and all went to the quay for the boat to Tresco. Due to a low tide we were landed at the newly built quay at Carn Near at the southern tip of the island. From there we walked along a concrete path between dunes where all manner of exotic plants have become established, from *Agapanthus*, *Fascicularia bicolor*, *Muhlenbeckia complexa* to *Watsonias* and Red Hot Pokers and many others. On the way there was a chance to see the tiny, rare Lesser Adder's-tongue Fern *Ophioglossum azoricum* just appearing through the turf.

Arriving at the Gardens the party split up into groups and wandered around. The Gardens looked lovely with the Puyas and *Furcreas* coming into flower being particularly impressive and the many different *Echiums* also at their best. Only a few signs of the damage from the frost last winter were showing and nothing to spoil our enjoyment. The incredibly tame birds were also popular! Robins, chaffinches, song thrushes, blackbirds and house sparrows all tried to get a share of our sandwiches at lunchtime.

The group reconvened in the afternoon to walk to New Grimsby to catch the boat back to St Mary's. Our route took us via a leisurely route around the Abbey walls and along the drive through woodland beside the Great Pool. A few water birds attracted attention, particularly gadwall. Back to Lyonesse for one of Melanie's substantial and delicious dinners.

7 May St Mary's, Carrick Dhu

Today the plan was to stay on the island of St Mary's. Our walk took a circular route around part of the island taking in the small 'community garden' of Carrick Dhu. This is a delightful little enterprise started by a few islanders to plant up a disused quarry (a ram pit). From there we walked along track ways back to the road and then into the nature reserve at Higher Moors where huge *Carex paniculata* plants line the path and lady's smock *Cardamine pratense* and other wetland plants were coming into flower. After walking along the beach at Porth Hellick some stayed beside the monument to Sir Cloudesley Shovel – the ill-fated admiral who lost four ships,

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their crews and his own life on the rocks of the Gilstone Rock in 1707. While some enjoyed their lunch in the sunshine a few walked up onto Porth Hellick Down to see the archaeological sites.

From Porth Hellick we made our way around the coastal path to Porth Minnick and then to Old Town where we could have tea at the cafe. A sudden shower put some off a continuation to the beautiful little churchyard and they returned to Town by a shorter route. Others braved the rain (which soon stopped) to look in the churchyard with its masses of primroses, cinerarias and ferns. Also the monuments to the tragic loss of life when the SS Schiller was wrecked in 1875 and to Augustus Smith the former Proprietor of the Isles of Scilly. Also in the churchyard is Harold Wilson's grave.

8 May St Martin's

During the night the wind had got up and the sea was looking rough. Four people opted to stay behind while the rest set off for St Martin's (it being too rough to go to St Agnes the original plan). On arrival on St Martin's after a somewhat choppy trip a cup of tea at the Seven Stones at Lower Town was welcome and also a chance to see the fantastic view across the shallow sea to St Mary's.

From the pub we walked across the top of the island and down onto the beautiful long white beach of Great Porth. In the dunes we saw one of the succulent *Carpobrotus* species that are common on the islands. This was a smaller species than the ubiquitous, large-flowered *C. edulis*, *C. aciniformis* known locally as Sally-My-Handsome. Then after walking the length of the beach we climbed up through the dunes and back along the island to Higher Town. From here we made our way to the famous bakery for fresh rolls, quiches and drinks which we consumed sitting in the sunshine outside.

After lunch, most of us walked to the meadow cum cricket field and walked over the chamomile scented turf to see the beautiful Seaside Buttercup *Ranunculus baudottii* growing in the pool. Several of the group made sorties/detours to see the red & white striped daymark and other parts of the island during our ramble, a chance to visit the vineyard seemed to appeal? Then back along the white sand beach to the quay and our boat back to St Mary's. On reaching St Mary's we were warned to take care leaving the harbour as the high spring tide was causing some waves to overtop the high wall and soak passersby. After dinner a few people went for a stroll but others retired early.

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9 May Departures & Arrivals

Today Group 1 were due to leave and Group 2 arrive. After breakfast everyone left their luggage in Melanie's front room. For the short time left most people went for another walk around or visited the Museum before the Airport bus whisked them away. Then Claire & Rosemary went to greet two new visitors, Pam & Peter who arrived on the *Scillionian* (the other eleven were due on the helicopter). Three of the party were independent, the rest all from Lakeland. This time Claire & Rosemary went to the Heliport to meet the group, but had to wait as the flight was late. But eventually all arrived and took the heliport bus to Town. Due to the late arrival it was almost straight into dinner. After dinner there was a chance to go to slide show about the islands.

10 May Tresco

Today we set off to Tresco. The weather was somewhat unsettled but Tresco seemed a popular choice with three boats eventually going to the island. Although we had to wait a few minutes we were soon off in the second boat. Again we landed at Carn Near and looked at the adder's-tongue ferns again. They had emerged rather more than during the first visit, but still unusual and tiny ferns. As today was Sunday there were no helicopters so there was a more peaceful atmosphere on the island. Again most of the day was spent in the Abbey gardens although a few people chose to go for an additional walks around the island to see the castles etc. Lunch was taken in the teashop and also some people stopped there for a cup of tea.

From the gardens the return was made along the north side of the Great Pool before returning to New Grimsby. Then back by boat to St Mary's.

11 May St Agnes

The weather forecast (winds easterly and strengthening) suggested today we should take our chance to visit St Agnes rather than stay on St Mary's. The cafe on the island was primed to expect our arrival for lunch so off we set. Arriving on St Agnes the first stop was a visit to a flower farm to see the fields where the scented Narcissus are grown in winter and others where pinks grow for summer markets. This farm has a wealth of important weed communities, including a number of rarities. Colourful species such as Corn Marigold *Chrysanthemum segetum*, Small-flowered Catchfly *Silene gallica*, the relict crop species Whistling Jacks, *Gladiolus byzantinus*, different kinds of Fumitories and grasses such as Quaking grass *Briza minor*, Squirrel's tail grass *Vulpia bromoides* and Great Brome *Anisantha diandrus*.

Next we walked to the southern heathland on Wingletang Down where an even rarer, and tinier Least Adderstongue Fern *Ophioglossum lusitanicum* grows. It was just over but the yellowing sterile fronds still visible. Also present was another delightful, but tiny rarity Orange Bird's-foot *Ornithopus pinnatus* scrambling over the heather.

Lunch was taken at the Coastguards cafe with local crab and ice cream. Then down the hill past the lighthouse to see a wall with Lanceolate Spleenwort *Asplenium obovatum* before crossing another cricket field cum chamomile *Chaemelum nobile* meadow past Big Pool to a rocky bay Porth Killier where whimbrel, ringed plover, turnstone in summer plumage and oystercatcher were watched for a while. Then a slightly more splashy and bumpy return on the boat to St Mary's.

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Orange Bird's-foot, *Ornithopus pinnatus* and Lesser Adders-tongue Fern, *Ophioglossum azoricum*



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12 May St Mary's Carrick Dhu

Today was a slightly later start as there was no boat to catch. First we walked to the unfinished bastion of Harry's Walls perched above the Harbour. The grass around the site is kept mown by English Heritage and is also full of chamomile and other flowers. Then down to the next bay at Porthloo where the boats are pulled up in the winter. There were still many boats waiting to be put down.

From Porthloo we wound our way through the series of wet fields along the valley that are managed by the Wildlife Trust. At this time of year they are full of flowering yellow flag iris and hemlock water dropwort. Arriving at Longstone at lunchtime we stopped there as George had arranged to meet Mrs June Lethbridge (who with her husband had started the community Carrick Dhu garden) later. Unfortunately the lunch turned out not a good experience for all. After a visit to the Carrick Dhu garden where the group heard that the enterprise there was very different to Lakeland with only a handful of people involved and without any long-term security of tenure from the Duchy of Cornwall who own the land.

From Carrick Dhu our way led through paths and along the road for a little way to the Nature reserve at Higher Moors. Although the weather had improved there was still a strong easterly wind so after a look along the beach at Porth Hellick we made our way back through a sheltered lane (past a big patch of the naturalised fern *Blechnum chilense* in a ditch) through the bulb farm fields of Salakee Farm. Then into Old Town where the cafe was visited for teas and for those disappointed by Longstone, fresh scones and cream! Then it was just a short walk back to Hugh Town through Lower Moors Nature Trail. Most of the group went that evening to an excellent talk by a local archaeologist on the history of the Isles of Scilly.

During both visits several people had taken opportunities to walk around other parts of St Mary's either independently or with the leaders. Barry carried out daily snail-hunting forays which we have heard since may have turned up an exciting new species for Scilly. Due to the stormy, albeit mostly sunny weather the local gig races were cancelled as were evening boat trips. So although gigs were sometimes seen practising in the Harbour we didn't get to see the inter-island races.

13 May Departures

The last day, so everyone was packing up and either moving to new rooms or leaving for the Airport. Rosemary & Claire accompanied the group to the Airport and then settled down in the cafe for more tea when the helicopter was inevitably delayed. As sea fog increased and the visibility lessened the leaders had some apprehension that they would be hunting for more overnight accommodation! Then the flight was announced! Later in the afternoon all flights stopped due to sea fog, but luckily by then the Wildlife Travellers were all safely back on the mainland.

Thank you to Ann Colville, Peter Landshoff, Pat Murphy and Claire Roper for donating photographs.

Rosemary Parslow May 2009

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