

**GLASGOW NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY EXCURSION TO ABERFOYLE,
1st May 2004**

**IAN McCALLUM
c/o GNHS, Zoology Museum, Graham Kerr Building, University of Glasgow G12 8QQ**

This is an account of a combined outing of the Glasgow Natural History Society and the Edinburgh Natural History Society to the Aberfoyle area. As part of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park celebration year, it was decided to have some of the Society's outings within the National Park.



THE EXCURSION GROUP

The members met at 11.00 hrs at the Woollen Mill in Aberfoyle, where sustenance was available. Outside the Mill there was a display of birds of prey and a collection of sheep including a magnificent 4-horned ram.

The party, which comprised 9 Edinburgh and 5 Glasgow members, was given a short description of the excursion before setting off. Thanks were given to Sandra Stewart and Kathleen Rowdon for agreeing to make lists of botanical species. The route followed the Glasgow to Aberfoyle disused railway line to Cobleland, returning to Aberfoyle on the other side of the River Forth via Robert Kirk's church.

The sun was shining and bird song was much in evidence. Swallows, house martin, willow warbler, robin, chaffinch, greenfinch, blackcap, stonechat and jay were seen or heard. Some of the best views were on the river, where we had good sightings of dipper and goosander.

Along the banks of the River Forth were animal tracks, and the leader illustrated a method of recording tracks using overhead projector film and drawing the tracks on the overlay. On the path the party found the maze-gill fungus *Daedalea quercina* on oak and further on a song thrush's anvil surrounded with the broken shells of its last meal.

Spring flowers were everywhere. Areas of mature woodland were carpeted with wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa* and wild hyacinth *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*. Alongside the track was a succession of flowers including three-veined sandwort *Moehringia trinervia*, germander speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys* and golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*.

A short talk was given describing the geology of the area. The Highland Boundary Fault runs from Stonehaven in the east to Arran and beyond in the west. It runs through Aberfoyle, and at Dounans quarry a

wedge of limestone has been exploited. This limestone has fossils of trilobites, brachiopods and ostracods, which date the rocks to 475 Ma (Ordovician Period). These fossils, together with fossils found in the Bofrichlie Burn, are the same as North American fossils, which prove that the Highlands were connected to North America. At that time there was no Atlantic Ocean, no North Sea and an Ocean called Iapetus separated Scotland from England and Wales. The Iapetus Ocean closed by the end of the Silurian Period (405 Ma) when Scotland and England were joined due to Tectonic Plate movements.

South of the fault are Old Red Sandstone (Devonian period - 400 Ma) conglomerates, formed by large rivers flowing from the North and the South. The red colour is due to the oxidisation of iron, which presumably took place during periods of high temperature. To the north of the fault lie the older Highland rocks.

During the Ice Ages that followed, the action of the ice sheets had a major effect on the scenery. The ice stripped the rocks and soil from the hills and when the ice melted, dumped the morainic material in the valleys.

Butterflies were also abundant – mostly Orange Tip, Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell and Green Veined White.

On the bridge over the Forth there were the ferns Wall Rue *Asplenium ruta-muraria* and Common Maidenhair Spleenwort *Asplenium trichomanes*

After walking through the caravan park the group had lunch on the banks of the Forth. The sun shone warmly and after lunch the party reluctantly moved off but only after a common sandpiper had been watched and a longhorn type of wood beetle had been closely examined.

The members continued following the Forth upstream past banks of primroses *Primula vulgaris*, sweet smelling Balsam poplars *Populus trichocarpa*, geans *Prunus avium*, and stopped at a fine example of a Douglas fir *Pseudotsuga menziesii*, where the diagnostic features were described – the citrus smell of the crushed foliage and the three-pronged bracts that resemble a trapped mouse under the cone scales.

Before moving on to the last stop at Aberfoyle Auld Kirk, the party visited the top of Doon Hill where messages to the fairies were read.

At the Kirk, mortsafes were examined and Robert Kirk's grave inspected. Robert Kirk was the fairy pastor who translated the psalms into Gaelic and wrote The Secret Commonwealth, which dealt with the second sight and the fairies. The question was, did Robert Kirk lie under the gravestone, or was he still in the world of the fairies?

In the car park there was an interesting information board on the Bailie Nicol Jarvie of Rob Roy fame and his poker still hangs from the tree. The parties returned to their transport about 16.15 hrs. Most then disappeared into the Woollen Mill for a rejuvenating cup of tea prior to heading home.