

Llanymynech Rocks Nature Reserve/Golf Course, Llanymynech 22/5/24

Organisers: Philippa Young and Maureen Preen

The Met Office issued an Amber warning for rain over North Wales, but Llanymynech was only under the Yellow warning, so MFS members convened despite the weather!

Maureen writes: much as garden owners who open to the public on a specific date are famous for saying 'You should have been here last week', so felt I, when members who braved the rain were faced with a soggy walk around the golf course, along Offa's Dyke and on to the rough tracks which cross Llanymynech Rocks.

On our recce a week earlier, Philippa and I had perfect weather and she pointed out Grizzled Skipper, Dingy Skipper, Common Blue and Small Copper butterflies, whilst I could identify some of the numerous wild flowers. We both marvelled at the brightness of the rock roses and at the stunning views.

On the day, the rock roses were closed up, only one butterfly was seen (also closed up) and the views were shrouded in rain clouds. But for those visiting for the first time, the uniqueness of this place was evident and I hope they go again, on a fine day.

Philippa: The botanists were undeterred by the rain and found many interesting plants. The Early Purple orchids were over, Butterfly Orchids were flowering and Twayblades were beginning to bud. Too many others to list here - please refer to the plant lists.

As the Golf Club generously offered shelter for the whole afternoon, with eleventh hour timing, Simon Spencer gave us a powerpoint talk before tea, rather than a quick chat in the car park. He showed us how startlingly different Llanymynech Hill looked earlier in the 20th Century - bare rocks and grass. He explained that the SSSI designation is for the rare lime grassland species. Trees and scrub can grow anywhere, but the special butterflies and flora at Llanymynech depend on trees being cleared and staying clear. He described decades of work attempting to re-instate something like traditional grazing in the Llanymynech and Llyncllys hilltops, in the long term this has not been successful, but he and others are still working on the project. His powerpoint also included many of the butterflies found at the reserve - incentive to visit again in sunshine.

We enjoyed a delicious and varied tea, while compiling plant lists and watching the view slowly clear through the golf club windows.

For those who do visit again, an alternative route up to the Rocks is along Pen Y Foel lane, where Maureen reports this notice: 'Darwin visited here in July 1831 to use his new clinometer - a geologists tool for measuring angles of slope (or tilt), elevation or inclination of an object with respect to the horizontal. He started his geological study in Penyfoel cutting, a novice geologist discovering how to use his instruments before touring N. Wales with Prof. Adam Sedgewick of Cambridge - an experienced geologist. Soon he developed enough geological knowledge to be appointed naturalist advisor on HMS Beagle in December 1831.'

P.S. Debbie Freeman intended to be an organiser, but unfortunately circumstances prevented her from taking part.

Report by Philippa Young and Maureen Preen