

WERN CLAYPIT RESERVE AND CANAL, ARDLEEN AND BUTTINGTON WHARF, WELSHPOOL



The Montgomery Canal fell into disrepair and became disused in the 1930s when it gradually developed into one of the UK's best wildlife sites.

Wern Claypit Nature Reserve is one of a series of reserves created alongside the canal to compensate for any impact on biodiversity caused by canal reconstruction work and subsequent boat traffic. The reserve creates the environmental conditions of a disused canal. Floating Water-plantain *Luronium natans* and, another nationally scarce species, Grass-wrack Pondweed *Potamogeton compressus* have been transplanted here from the main canal in the hope that they will go on to colonise other parts of the reserve.

Our aim was to explore the wetland habitat on the opposite bank of the canal but first we had a look at the tow path verges where we were pleased to see Skullcap *Scutellaria galericulata* and other favourites. We noted that Water-soldier *Stratiotes aloides* is the dominant plant in this part of the canal and a potential problem if not carefully managed. Our guide for the day, Kate Thorne, pointed out that it seems to prefer full sun and this enables Frogbit *Hydrocharis morsus-ranae* to thrive in the more shaded areas.

We set off with Kate and her friend Sue (both experts on the botany of the local area) to a field adjacent to the canal where the accommodating owners had moved their horses out and tethered their watchful billy goat in the polytunnel for our visit. We were free to roam in the tall vegetation of the field but were halted towards the canal bank where it got decidedly squelchy. Our wellie-clad leaders did the honours by wading in the long vegetation to find as many interesting plants as they could muster. There was Cyperus Sedge *Carex pseudocyperus*, Bladder Sedge *C. vesicaria* and Hairy Sedge *C. hirta*; Fine-leaved Water-dropwort *Oenanthe aquatica*, Hemlock Water-dropwort *O. crocata* and Tubular Water-dropwort *O. fistulosa* plus Marsh Stitchwort *Stellaria palustris* in its only known location in Montgomeryshire.

Back on the towpath we spotted the long, narrow leaves of Fen Nettle *Urtica dioica* ssp. *galeopsifolia* and we did the touch test to prove that it doesn't sting but, be warned, Common Nettle *U. dioica* ssp. *dioica* may be lurking in the foliage (the voice of experience!). Kate used a grapnel to give us a close look at Unbranched Bur-reed *Sparganium emersum*. Then there was a change of focus when we admired a pike *Esox lucius* hiding in the canal vegetation quietly in wait for its prey and some freshwater sponge *Spongilla lacustris* growing on the bridge wall just below the water surface. After lunch we visited the towpath near Buttington Wharf where Kate located Floating Water-plantain *L. natans* and we were able to examine the leaves at close range.

Many thanks to Kate and Sue, our dedicated leaders who went out of their way to make sure that this was a rewarding and enjoyable excursion for everyone.

SHEENA PATERSON

MONTGOMERY CANAL

After a damp start the group set off along the canal in dry weather and walked briskly to a bridge and lock where the botanising started. Black Spleenwort *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum*, Great Mullein *Verbascum thapsus* and Hart's-tongue Fern *A. scolopendrium* were seen growing on the brick walls. The surface of the canal had a good population of Frogbit *Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*. Using a grapnel our leader, Martin Godfrey, fished several plants out of the water. These included: Common Duckweed *Lemna minor*, Ivy-leaved Duckweed *L. trisulca*, Nuttall's Waterweed, *Elodea nuttallii* and Fool's-water-cress *Helosciadium nodiflorum*.

The walk back along the canal yielded Square-stalked Willowherb *Epilobium tetragonum* and, at the water's edge, Branched Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum*. There was much discussion as to the identity of pondweeds with the decision made (and later confirmed) that there were specimens of Blunt-leaved Pondweed *Potamogeton obtusifolius* and Long-stalked Pondweed *P. praelongus* present. Another duckweed was found after lunch, Greater Duckweed *Spirodella polyrhiza*. We crossed over the aqueduct, now dry, and looked down onto the River Vyrnwy, a tributary of the River Severn.



Blunt-leaved
Pondweed

At the water's edge we saw Water Horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile*, with its characteristic hollow stem and the large, attractive leaves of Water Dock *Rumex hydrolapathum*.

Towards the end of the walk Martin found one specimen of Floating Water-plantain *Luronium natans*. It was carefully returned to the water after examination. Apparently, the swans, a family of seven, are inclined to graze on these plants.

It was a very pleasant, not too strenuous, day with the added benefit that being by the water the plants hadn't suffered too much from the recent high temperatures and lack of rain. Thanks to Martin for leading the walk.

BARBARA LEWIS