



# Wyre Forest Study Group

## Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club.

FOURTH FIELD MEETING, THURSDAY, AUGUST 25TH, 1904.

The Forest of Wyre was visited on Thursday, August 25th. Leaving Hereford at 9-20, Woofferton was reached at 10-20, and Wyre Forest Station, on the Tenbury and Bewdley Branch, at about 11-0 a.m.

Shortly before reaching Woofferton, about 300 yards south of the railway station, the line leaves Herefordshire and enters Shropshire. From Woofferton Junction, the Tenbury and Bewdley branch of the Great Western Railway, after running for two miles through a southern tongue of Shropshire, traverses, in the parish of Little Hereford, three miles of one of the northern tongues of Herefordshire. After passing Easton Court Station it crosses the Ledwyche Brook, a tributary of the Teme, and re-enters Shropshire. The boundary thence between the counties of Worcester and Salop is so irregular that the line runs alternately through two to three miles of each county.

The line of the old disused canal, formerly called the Kington, Leominster and Stourport Canal, is frequently visible on the left (west) of the line between Leominster and Woofferton, in the parish of Orleton. It is again visible beyond Woofferton in its easterly course towards the Severn at Stourport, fragments being seen occasionally on the left (north) of the line until, at the distance of about nine miles east of Woofferton, it is crossed by the railway line.

From *The Leominster Guide*, 1803, p 236, we read that the idea of opening a communication from this district to Stourport on the Severn and the collieries was revived in 1790. By Mr. Dadford's survey a canal was projected from Kington through Staunton-on-Arrow, Kingsland, Leominster, Putnal Field, near Orleton, over Letwich (sic) Brook, through Cherry Orchard, Marlbrook, Sousnet, Pensax (a tunnel of 3,850 yards), Abberley and Arley to the Severn near Stourport, an extent of 45 miles, through three tunnels, at the estimated cost of £82,907. The estimate was afterwards raised to £120,000, and an Act passed empowering to raise £150,000 by subscription. Great difficulties were encountered in its construction, especially in perforating through Putnal Field, near Orleton.

In *Historical and Topographical Account of Leominster*, by John Price, 1795, in the chapter on The State of Navigation, on pages 185 to 195, we read on page 195 . . . The work is completed from Sousnet to Leominster, except the tunnel at Putnal Field.

In *The History of Kington*, by Richard Parry, 1845, we read, page 214, that the survey was made by Mr. Dadford in 1789 . . . and that the work is completed from Sousnet to Leominster, but that the part towards Stourport has been found so expensive as not likely to

be soon finished; and that on the part between Kington and Leominster nothing has been done except a small portion at Kingsland.

Sousnet is situated between Marlbrook and Pensax, where the long tunnel of 3,850 yards penetrates the southern part of the Forest of Wyre Coal Measures.

About 11 miles after leaving Woofferton railway station, half a mile northwards of Neen Sollars, in Shropshire, the line traverses a geological fault in the cutting where, for the extent of one furlong, is an exposure of Upper Silurian (Ludlow) formation, including a thin band of Aymestrey Limestone (Geological Map LV., N.E.). This detached Silurian rock, one furlong in width, is a little more than one mile in length.

A further ride of four miles brings us to Cleobury Mortimer Station, 15 miles from Woofferton, into the Coal Field of the Forest of Wyre. In the short distance of 17 miles from Woofferton to Wyre Forest there are five intermediate stations.

From a paper on *The Forest of Wyre Coal Field*, by Daniel Jones, F.G.S., published for the Dudley Geological Society in 1894, we learn that many fruitless attempts to discover coal of a productive character had been made at great cost in the borings at the Town Mill, Coventry Mill, and near Furnace Mill, all three of them near the Dowles Brook in the Forest of Wyre Coal Field. Mr. Jones had sections of borings from the Town Mill at 1,146 feet, near Furnace Mill at 804 feet, and from Coventry Mill, in which the coal bearing strata were entirely absent. The more valuable coal fields lie further north.

Wyre Forest Railway Station is in Worcestershire. As soon as our party had assembled Mr. Moore seized the opportunity of exhibiting several water worn pebbles which he had brought in a strong knapsack, and demonstrating upon the fact of the pebbles bearing typical characteristics of ice action in being smoothed, polished, grooved and scratched. They had been extracted by hand, from a depth of from 50 to 60 feet below the surface level, out of the Gravel Drift on the bank of the Midland railway at Stretton Sugwas, three miles from Hereford. Amongst the specimens was one from the Old Weir Bank on the Wye, an extension about one mile westwards of the same Gravel Drift.

Mr. Moore endeavoured to enlist the interests of the members in the study of the much neglected subject of our gravel beds and dried up river valleys, with the conviction that important discoveries would result therefrom, as he himself had witnessed.



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Upon the conclusion of Mr. Moore's address, the botanical section of the party advanced under the direction of Rev. A. Ley. The main party, conducted by Mr. Carleton Rea, President of the Worcestershire Naturalists' Club, commenced their rambles towards the Forest.

The Forest was entered at a gate about 200 yards west of the station. Crossing Dowles Brook, the boundary here between Worcestershire and Shropshire, we walked through Brand Wood and The Bank, skirting the left bank of the brook, to Furnace Mill. Here a halt was made for inspection of the picturesque Waterfall. Thence the ramble was continued over the open ground north of the Mill, overgrown with heath in glorious luxuriance.

Proceeding onwards along Breckneck Bank, a halt was ordered in order to await the arrival of stragglers. The next halt was in a clearing in the wood, in which were visible traces of the cuttings for the lines of syphons of the Water-conduit to Birmingham from the Elan Valley in Wales.

The line of the conduit exhibited a marked declivity westwards of more than 100 feet fall in the distance of about half a mile down to the Bavenny Brook in the Dingle, where there was a Wash-out Chamber; from this lowest point there was, upon the eastern side of the Dingle and brook, a rise, apparently of one hundred feet in the shorter distance of a quarter of a mile.

A detour northwards of about one hundred yards brought us to the largest Juniper tree in the Forest, a tree about 25 feet high, far beyond its prime, and exhibiting signs of decay in its lower branches.

From the Juniper\* tree we retraced our steps into the open ground, and recrossed the line of the Birmingham Water conduit. Here some of the party left the Forest and visited Cleobury Mortimer. The remainder continued their rambles southwards through Malpas's Wood, in which they passed through a large bed of Lily of the Valley; thence through Coachroad Coppice to a portion of Wyre Common, carpeted with heath in still greater luxuriance than was met with in the earlier part of the day, through which some of us waded almost waist deep. Crossing the railway eastwards of Cleobury Mortimer Station and extending our explorations upon the rising and more open ground on Hungry Hill, we met the Botanical Section, under the guidance of Rev. A. Ley, who gave us the results of their work as follows :-

The energies of the Botanical Members of the party were devoted almost exclusively to Brambles, August

being the month during which their observation can most profitably be carried on. About 20 to 22 species of these plants were observed; among which two rarities, *Rubus fusco-ater*, W., and *R. serpens*, W., are abundant throughout the district visited. Two of the Suberect group, which is so rare in Herefordshire, *R. fissus*, Lindl., and *R. plicatus*, W. and N., were noticed on the heath, and in the heathy wood near Cleobury Station; also the rare variety, *triangularis*, Ley, of *R. dumetorum*, W. and N., recently described by Rev. A. Ley in the *Journal of Botany* (see *Transactions* 1900-1902, p. 237). It is clear that the Forest is very rich in Bramble forms, and merits more than a cursory day's examination, especially with a view to the record of these plants in the two counties of Worcester and Salop, the boundary of which runs through it. The ground examined today by this botanical section lay exclusively within the latter county.

The day was unfavourable for Entomologists owing to the absence of the sun. In the open glades of the forest the brimstone butterfly (*Gonepteryx rhamni*) was seen, the bright yellow of the wings being very conspicuous. A few fritillaries were noticed, much worn, and consisted of two species, *Argynnis paphia* and *Aglaia*. The *Vanessidæ* were represented by *Vanessa io*, *Atalanta* and *Urticæ*, and were fairly numerous. The common blue (*Polyommatus Alexis*) was met with on the margin of the forest in very limited numbers. Time did not permit of beating for moths, but a rare "Plume" was disturbed, and was captured by Mr. Carleton Rea. The President took a larva of *Dicranura furcula* on aspen.

The following birds were observed: Several specimens of the Green Woodpecker (*Gecinus viridis*), Common Heron (*Ardea cinerea*), Red Grouse (*Lagopus scoticus*).

Only one adder, or may-be phantom adder, was seen, notwithstanding that several Members made diligent search for them. Members were forewarned in the programme to wear gaiters as adders were numerous in the Forest.

One deer was seen. There are several in the Forest which have escaped from a neighbouring park.

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