

Botanical notes

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In 2002 the Buteshire Natural History Society became a corporate member of the BSBI, and the author was appointed recorder for vice-county 100 (Clyde Isles). He is responsible for maintaining a database of all vascular plant records from Arran, Bute, Cumbrae and the adjacent islands. This is held on the Museum computer in a program called Mapmate which enables a distribution map of each species to be viewed on screen, as well as details of every underlying record. It also allows records to be shared electronically with the BSBI hub, which stores the nine million records used in the compilation of the *New Atlas of the British Flora*.

The author inherited from his predecessor, Tony Church, some 30,000 records for the vice-county, mostly from Arran, where Tony lives. It was apparent that, while Arran was tolerably well recorded, plant recording in Bute and, to a lesser degree, Cumbrae had been seriously neglected for many years. Cumbrae was comprehensively botanised in the Victorian period, and two more recent (but less adequate) lists have been published for that island [Fletcher & Martin, 1960; Rhynd, 1988], but it became clear that nothing comparable to this had been done for Bute.

Few districts of the United Kingdom are so deficient in printed botanical records. Ballantyne published a list in 1911, and there are a number of references in Hennedy [1865], King [1891] and Lee [1933], mostly repeating the same early Victorian records. Prof. J Dickson and Dr W Boyd left some useful notes from the 1980s, but despite these and the personal knowledge of some Society members the island remained seriously under-recorded throughout the 20th century. Even a flying visit by a BSBI team prior to its publication did not prevent the *New Atlas* [Preston, Pearman and Dines 2002] from being rather deficient in its Bute squares.

The only other extant list of Bute plants with any pretence to completeness is that compiled by James Robertson, who spent ten days on the island in June 1768, in the course of a tour around western Scotland [Dickson 1986]. The Museum archive has a copy of this list, which was sent to the Third Earl, himself a keen botanist. Surprisingly, perhaps, virtually all the plants on Robertson's list are still present on the island, some having been refound only in the past three years. But no one could cover the whole island adequately in such a short time, and many plants must have been missed. Moreover, a number of common species were omitted, especially among the sedges and grasses which were not always well understood even by expert taxonomists at that date. Thus, while affording a historic record of enormous interest from the very beginning of scientific botany in Scotland, this list cannot provide more than a fascinating preface to a modern Flora.

Bute Flora Project

As a belated remedy, the author inaugurated a botanical survey of the island. The immediate intention is to publish an up-to-date check list of flowering plants and ferns, with some notes on distribution and habitat. The island has been divided into 116 recording districts, with a view to compiling as comprehensive a list as possible for each of these. A map of the districts, along with information on the current progress of the survey, is displayed in the natural history gallery. Every district has been visited at least once since 2002, but two or three visits will be needed in most areas to achieve an acceptable level of coverage. More than 600 species (including established garden escapes) have so far been recorded in the course of the survey, and c.20,000

records accumulated. It is anticipated that in the longer term this check list may serve as the kernel of a true *Flora* of the island. In the meantime, it is a recorder's duty, as well as keeping records and making his own, to involve all interested persons in the process of botanical recording, and it is the author's hope that members of the Society will help with the project.

Bryophyte recording

Since the publication of her article [Cocking 1996] Katie has retired as bryophyte recorder for vc100, and Paul King has taken her place. Despite living in Suffolk, Mr King has a keen interest in the bryophyte flora of the Clyde islands, and intends to visit from time to time. Anyone interested in bryophytes should contact him through the author or Mrs Munro. It is very desirable that bryophytes should be included in the projected Flora of Bute, if adequate help could be made available to complete the necessary field work.

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