

These Bute Puff Balls seen from the Ettrick Bay – Ballianlay Road could be mistaken for recumbent sheep. But the Bute examples are dwarfed when one reads of an American specimen with a diameter of 5' 4" and a circumference of 15', it was only 9½" high.

Ramsbottom describes the skin as being downy at first and then smooth like a white kid glove. At this stage the flesh is firm and white and edible. Unsuccessful attempts were made in Denmark to grow them commercially for food. At this stage too, it used to be used by surgeons to staunch a bleeding wound. The flesh when ripier and dry smoulders when lit and can be used to smoke and quieten bees. As with the bracket fungi of the Birch tree it can be used as tinder to carry a light from one house to another or even from one village to another, or to be taken by a country worker in a tin to start his fire for his cup of tea.

There are at least 23 British species of Puff Ball. The one common on Bute is probably *Vascellum pratense* to be seen lying like white golf balls in the short grass of our foreshores. It makes good eating sliced and fried when the flesh is firm, but remove the skin before cooking. When ripe and the skin dries and bursts one can see it puffing out myriads of spores. I used to think that this was simply how it got its name but the etymologists derive the word puff from the Celtic word puck or the Irish Word puca or the Icelandic or Swedish word puke all denoting an elf or hobgoblin (Rolfe 1925).

I would be most grateful if anyone reading this, knowing of Giant Puff Balls growing anywhere on Bute would let me know.

I acknowledge with thanks Dr Silverside's advice and help in the preparation of this note.

Bibliography

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CYNOGLOSSUM OFFICINALE HOUND'S TONGUE

Dorothy N. Marshall

Hound's Tongue grows freely on the foreshore to the E of the burn which flows into Glencallum Bay (NS 112527). As this is the only known West of Scotland locality for it a fuller note than that published by Dr. J. H. Dickson in the Glasgow Naturalist Part 2 (1981) may be of interest.

As far as I know, it was first recognised by Mrs Margot Young when walking with me about 1959. Then it did not spread, as far as I can remember, more than about 10 yards. It is such an unusual plant I think it unlikely that I would have missed it if it had been growing there much earlier.

Mrs M. Munro saw one or two plants half a mile N of the bay at the Hawk's Neb (NS 114539). about 1961. The plant has not persisted there.

When Dr. W. M. Boyd saw it in 1962 at Glencallum Bay it had spread to some 30 yards. Now 1985, it grows along the foreshore for about 100 yards.

As the S end of Bute is run as a sheep farm, Dr. Boyd suggests some of its hooked seeds might have been caught in the fleece of sheep brought in from off the island some time in the late 1950s.