

ASHRIDGE DISPLAY, OCTOBER 27th to 29th 2013

A THREE DAY EVENT RUN JOINTLY WITH HBFGB FOR THE NATIONAL TRUST

Penny Cullington

Ashridge was the ideal venue for this event: a SSSI site half in Bucks, half in Herts, a large expanse of mature mixed woodland with good grassland areas too, also a very popular destination for recreation having car parks and excellent facilities including a café and shop within the NT building complex where our display was to be held. Planning for this our most ambitious event by far started over six months ago, involving meetings and many emails for the six of us involved - three from each group, putting together the design, logistics and contents for the display under the leadership of Steve Kelly, our enthusiastic and tireless organiser. This was our joint contribution to National Fungus Day, for which the BMS provided our banners to adorn the entrance, seen below.



The entrance to the display, framed by our two group banners.

Ashridge provided us with the room, a few tables and boards for posters and also made the basic framework for our woodland scene. The rest was down to us: more display boards, posters to cover them, fresh specimens and also some models expertly made by Steve, materials to create the woodland scene provided by Claudi, information leaflets, photos, sporeprints, a TV screen provided by Derek showing an endless stream of fungi species found at Ashridge – the images supplied by several of us. As the day for setting up approached there was much to do, not least the unpredictable business of collecting specimens upon which the whole event depended. When it came to it, would group members go out and supply us with enough material to make a really good show?

Saturday was set-up day, and it took five of us together with a couple of willing helpers the best part of seven hours to put it all together. Were we inundated with the requested specimens from group members? Well, actually no! Just one or two faithful souls had been out, so Steve and Margaret went off for supplies, which with their skill and knowledge of the area were quickly forthcoming.



The woodland scene (left and above) together with real beech tree and large log, showing a mix of fresh specimens and models. Some of our photos can be seen to the right. (The birds on the left were a permanent fixture, and though perhaps a little distracting for the purposes of our display, could not be removed!)

We opened at 10.00 on Sunday and were immediately inundated with visitors despite the rather dreary day with wind and rain forecast. At 10.30 the first of our two forays got under way, with thirty pre-booked NT forayers divided into two groups, led by Steve & Margaret and Derek & myself, leaving a few stalwart member to man the display, chatting to visitors and ensuring nothing went missing in our absence. On our return we supplemented the specimen trays with the morning's finds, identifying as best we could without recourse to books and scopes – we now had an impressive selection as there was ample around to collect without spoiling the autumn spectacle of fruiting for the many walkers in the area.

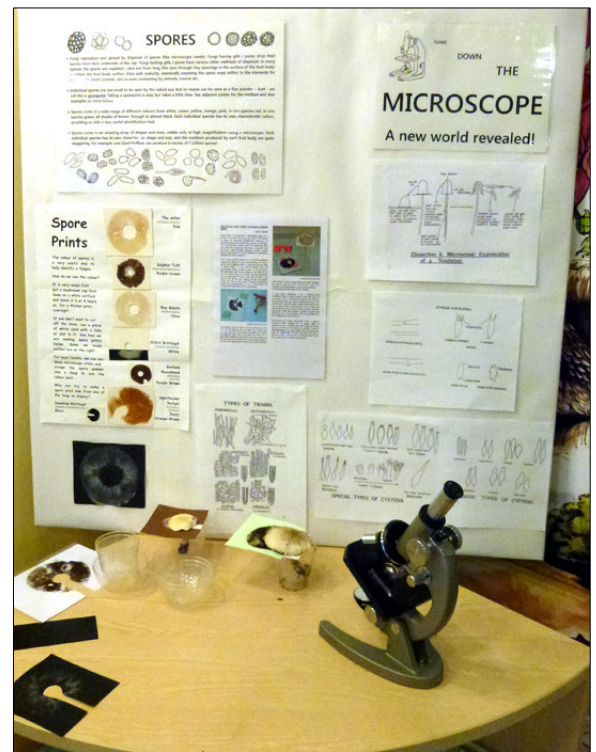


Our trays of named fresh collections, with Claudi and Toni left, and some of our information posters and photos above.

At 2.00 the second foray set out, again with two parties and Joanna replacing me with a few group members to help also. Meanwhile we were kept busy in the display by a steady stream of interested visitors with many children full of questions and observations. The many different facets on view prompted much comment and admiration, even disbelief at some of the facts.

We packed up at 4.30, all exhausted but pleased and also relieved with how the day had gone. The two forays produced a list of over 100 species (see separate list for details) – not an enormous number for this site but our focus today was on introducing the public to the delights of fungi and foraging, and not on recording. The weather was rapidly deteriorating with the exceptionally high winds forecast for the following day unfortunately threatening to close the site and our display with it. Luckily in the event we were able to open up at 10.30 the next morning as planned, though visitors were no doubt reduced by the stormy conditions but still came in fairly good numbers. Tuesday, our third day, also produced a pretty constant flow, the event having been planned to coincide with Half Term week.

We called it a day at 3.00, though the onerous task of dismantling and packing up only took an hour or so, thanks to the generous time given by our few hard-working helpers. As always the success of such occasions depends upon the dedicated efforts of the faithful few despite the encouraging noises often made by the inactive many. Considering the fact that membership of the two groups amounts jointly to around 80, also the fact that requests for helpers and specimen collection had been circulated, it is perhaps surprising – certainly a little disappointing - that not more than around 30 people made any sort of contribution.



Our sporeprint and microscope corner



Another display board with information about a selection of edible and poisonous species, and beneath it some commonly asked questions with their answers.

Having devised and prepared this event from scratch, hopefully if asked to repeat it in future we shall now have the basis ready to hand and also some experience of how to go about it. For such events there always remains the nagging worry that fruiting will be poor and not sufficient to supply a good showing on the day, but that's fungi for you! It is clear that the public are hungry for education and information on this fascinating subject, and we are more than happy to be able to share our acquired knowledge and skills with as many people as we can.

A big, big *thank you* is due to those who contributed so much to making this event not only possible but a real success:

Steve Kelly and his team:

Pat Cavanagh, Penny Cullington, Margaret Kelly, Derek Schafer, Claudi Soler

Also many thanks to those who supplied photos or gave time to help with setting up and manning the display on one or more of the days:

Mike Cockburn, Paul Cullington, Joanna Dodsworth, Greg Douglas, Sandra Hayter, Jan Humphreys, Roger Kemp, Alan Nicoll, Alan & Pattie Outen, Kerry Robinson, Jenny Schafer, Toni Standing

Also thanks to those who supported by attending the forays or visiting the display:

John & Patricia Baker, Keith Cavanagh, Jacqui Darby, Marilyn Donohue, Frederick Haas, Erica Mohr, Nick Standing, John Tyler.



Our information boards, Herts & Beds Fungi Group left, and Bucks Fungus Group right, with TV screen above showing a constant stream of fungi photos.