BFG foray at College Wood - April 7th 2013

Report by Penny Cullington

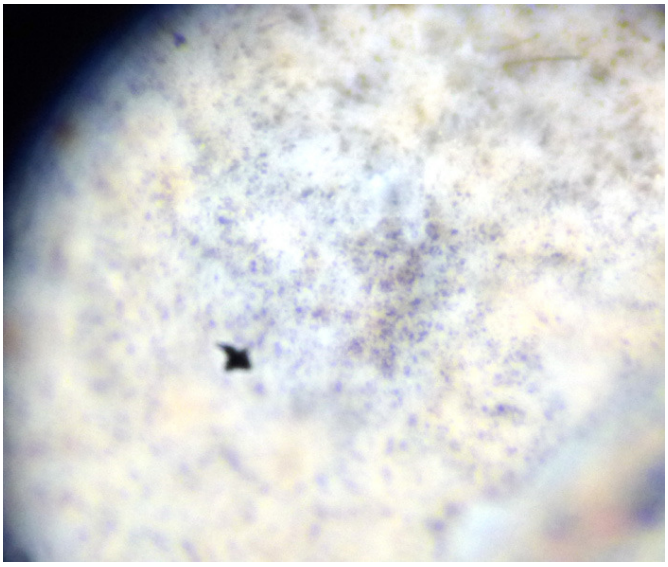
Four BFG members were joined by some enthusiastic members of the Winslow Transition Group who had requested a foray here – their local patch. It was a bright sunny morning, and despite the previous night's frost we relished the lack of cold wind and pleasant signs of Spring as the morning warmed up. This was our first foray here at this time of year, so it was likely that we would turn up some species new for the site despite the unfavourable conditions: an extended winter period with much frost and little rain in the last month or so. It was therefore not at all surprising that no 'mushroom / toadstool' type fungi were to be seen, in fact the only gilled fungus found was a somewhat dried up specimen of *Panellus stipticus* (Bitter oysterling). As I had predicted before we set out, everything we found was on wood or woody substrates with nothing in evidence on the soil; much turning over of logs, inspecting of fallen branches and dead stems was required to find anything of interest.

Both Joanna and I had recently attended a course studying corticioids (a large group of fungi which to the untrained eye look more like splashes of white paint on fallen wood etc), and we were keen to test out our newly acquired skills. These seemingly 'boring' resupinate (i.e. flat) fruitbodies can fruit at any time of year, unlike the vast majority of mushrooms / toadstools which occur only in the Autumn, but their main attraction to the amateur mycologist comes from examining them with a microscope, when a vast array of different features can help with identification. (See photos below). Of our list of just under 40 species for the morning well over half were new to the site. The list comprised quite a few corticioids, together with some brackets, some ascomycetes (the spore-shooters rather than spore-droppers such as mushrooms) and one slime mould. Perhaps the highlight of the morning, producing a few 'Oohs and Aahs', was a nice collection of *Sarcoscypha austriaca* (Scarlet elfcup) growing in a damp area on mossy submerged wood. The habitat felt just right for this species so I was very much hoping it would turn up; although late in the season – it usually fruits from December to February – it is having a 'good year' this year and is apparently making the most of our extended cold spell. Below is a photo I took a few weeks ago in the Forest of Dean where it was fruiting in abundance.

For more details see the complete list.

Sarcoscypha austriaca (Scarlet elfcup) growing on its typical substrate of damp mossy rotting fallen wood, in this case Willow. Coalpit Wood, Forest of Dean, in March 2013.

Two common corticoid species we found today at College Wood:



Hyphodontia alutaria, no common English name, was growing on soggy rotting deciduous wood. Photo 1 shows the typical white scurfy surface found in many such corticioids, viewed under a stereo dissecting microscope, i.e. nothing to write home about.

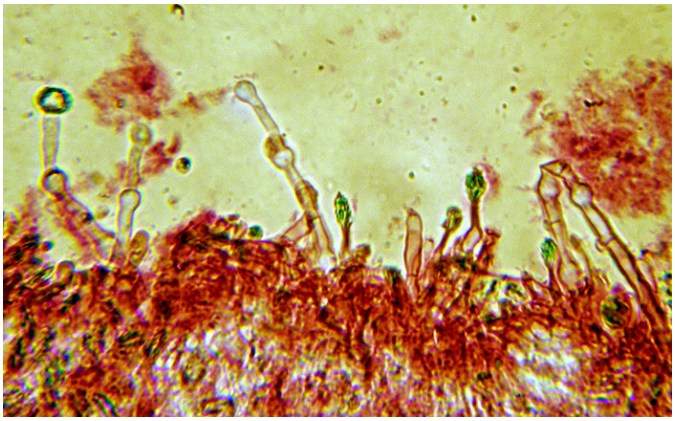


Photo 2 shows the surface magnified x 400 on a compound microscope, where in this particular species two sorts of cystidia (special sterile cells) can be seen: those with swellings along its length and also at the tip, and with (kidney-shaped) clamps at the septa (lines dividing its length into sections) – one being visible on the righthand cystidia in this photo; also those much shorter and thinner spikes encrusted with crystals at the tips - these look green in this enhanced photo.

Amylostereum chailletii, again no common name, was growing on the underside of a conifer log. Photo 1, taken in the field, shows the typical mauve pinky-grey patches of this species.

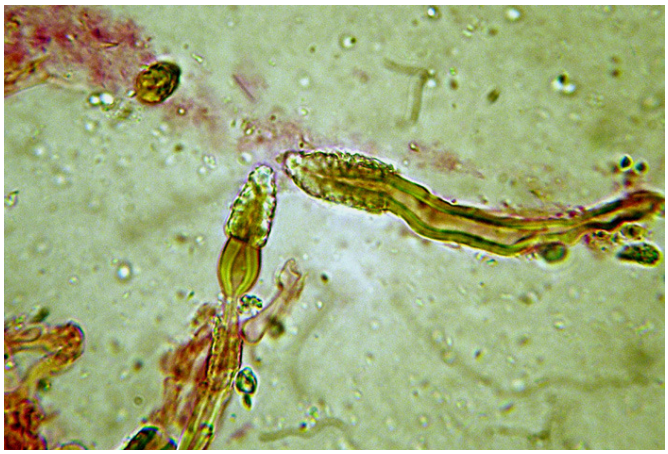


Photo 2 shows two thick-walled cystidia with encrusted tips, a feature which helped to confirm the identification. The magnification here is x 1000.