

DISCOVERING LONG WOOD

January, 2007

Weather Report

A wet, exceptionally mild and windy month, with gales and storm force winds. There was a total of over 80 millimetres of rainfall and apart from a brief two day spell when light snow showers occurred, temperatures were well above average for the time of year.

Extracts from Rodney's Diary

14th January

Inspection right around boundary after stormy weather. Found several trees down. Hazel across track just outside wood gate.



Large section of hornbeam that had badly rotted stool, blown down by field at extreme western end. Two uprooted chestnuts that were already dead, hung up between track and

field on northern boundary. Section of hornbeam snapped off and hanging over field fence opposite tool shed cleared. Dead standing hemlock and large birch both hanging over field fence at extreme eastern end brought down and cleared from fence. Both heavily covered with ivy. Numerous other small bits blown off, including dead birch tops.

15th January

Two wind blown trees down in field at bottom corner by stream, cut up and cleared from field. Small amount of brash burnt off on picnic site.

24th January

Quick walk round on way home from work after recent storms. Six live looking hemlocks uprooted in northern section. Four in one block of root ball next



to water filled drainage gully and two singles slightly further west. All blown down in a southwesterly direction rather than westerly as with previous gale. One small dead birch branch snapped off and

fallen across fence into field in eastern corner and large heavily ivy coated ash blown over to about 70 degrees towards stream in bottom corner.

Storm Force 10
versus
Western Hemlock

Rustling,
Trembling,
Twitching,
Swaying.

Roaring.
Creaking,
Crashing.
Slaying,

Mangling,
Tangling.
Dangling,
Splaying.

January

From a distance the colours are dull, muted, almost sombre – earth pigments, umbers, siennas, ochres, greys. There are dark shadows.

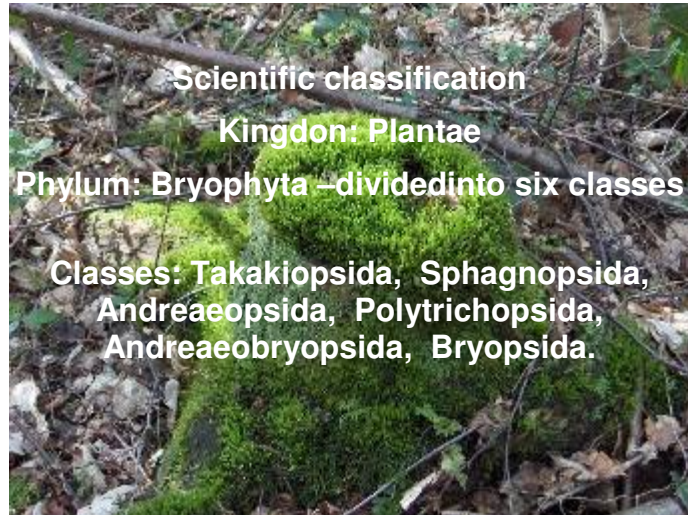
Zoom in.

The sun shines through the bare branches and fallen twigs highlighting vibrant green tufts and mats and arching fronds; plump cushions, spiky protrusions, creeping fingers, around the bases of trees, over decaying logs, softening the track, springing up between dead and decomposing leaves. Every shade of green is represented.

Look even closer.

Discover tiny pointed leaves shaped like miniature spearheads crowded along stems, some short and simple, others branching and trailing. The occasional dainty cylindrical fruit capsule juts up above the foliage on a slender stalk.

January is moss month.



Mosses are simple green land plants, which thrive in moist shaded places. They have leaves and a stem but no roots, usually being attached to the ground by delicate colourless or brown threads called rhizoids. The growth habits of the mosses in Long Wood are either erect, often with unbranched stems and described as acrocarpous, or pleurocarpous meaning they are prostrate with short lateral branches.

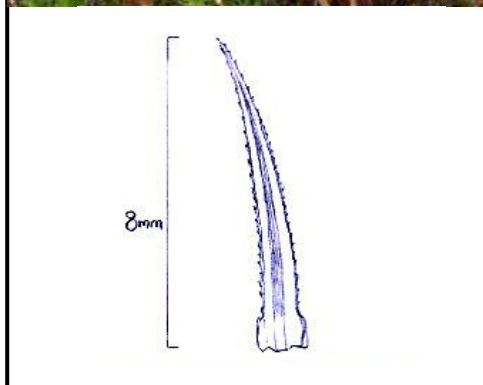
Mosses have leaves in spirals or sometimes two flat rows. In many the leaves are only one cell thick. The plant contains the male (antheridia) and female (archegonia) sexual structures and requires water for the male cells to migrate to the archegonium. After fertilisation the egg develops into a spore-containing capsule on a stalk called a seta. The capsule sheds spores as a fine dust and this then develops into new plants.

The richest places for finding mosses in our wood are along the ghyll stream banks, in the vicinity of the main track towards the old tool shed where water often stands in puddles on the

surface, and on the many stumps and moist rotting logs that litter the woodland floor.

The combination of deep shade and the accumulation of acid needle litter have resulted in very few examples managing to exist under the 'wolf end' conifers.

With the aid of a hand lens, a basic microscope and reference books, I have been able to identify eighteen different mosses so far. It hasn't been easy identifying them - but fascinating learning how to. These are two examples of how all the species are recorded in my notebook:



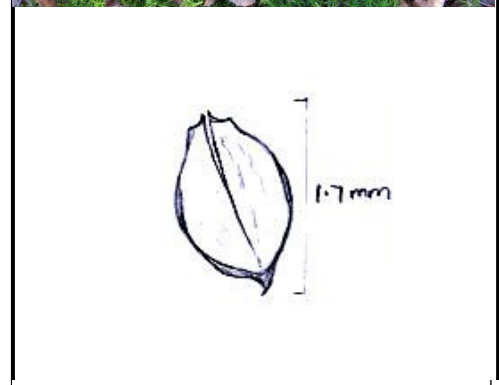
Scientific name:- Polytrichastrum formosum
Wood Hair Moss

Description:-

Slim, stiff upright stems 7-10cm high. Long, dark green glossy leaves held at right angles to the stem when moist, but erect, rolled and flattened to stem when dry. The lance-shaped leaves narrow to an orange coloured point. They have a glossy, almost colourless base and margin is finely toothed all the way round.

Location:-

Along the ground at edges of main ride, east of the picnic site.



Scientific name:- Scleropodium purum
Near Feather Moss

Description:-

Densely overlapping, glossy light green leaves gives the stem a swollen, worm-like appearance. Stems regularly branched with blunt shoot tips. Individual leaves are broad and concave with a minute pointed tip.

Location:-

At side of main track where water ditch crosses over