

Ledbury Naturalists Field Club

Field Survey 2002/3

Frith Wood and Bradlow Field



February 2004

Acknowledgements

Project Coordinator: Peter Garnett

Document, Data Collation

And Photography: Janet Parry

Graphics: Alan Parry

Members who carried out the survey, whose expertise and help was vital to the success of the project:

Dudley Brook	Carolyn Evans	Lorna Garnett	Peter Garnett
Jenny Grant	Cherry Greenway	Michael Harper	John Meiklejohn
Janet Parry	Margaret Rist	David Taft	Stephanie Thomson
Stella Whitmore	Lucia Windsor	Kate Wollen	

Gillian Davis and Lorraine Weaver of University College Worcester, who helped with the Bryophytes.

Access:

Forest Enterprise through Kate Wollen, who allowed use of the forestry car park.

Validation of observations and checking of data:

John Meiklejohn, Stephanie Thompson, Michael Harper and Peter Garnett

Introduction

Ledbury is fortunate in having an extensive area of woodland and a network of public footpaths immediately adjacent to the town. Frith Wood in particular is used for recreation and provides easy access to the natural environment.

In 2002, members and friends of Ledbury Naturalists' Field Club began the survey of Frith Wood and Bradlow Field, which has been continued in 2003. The survey had been planned to start in 2001 but was postponed due to the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in that year. An interim report was produced in 2003 using the 2002 data. This final report includes all the data gathered over both 2002 and 2003 to give a more complete picture of the natural history of the survey areas.

Background

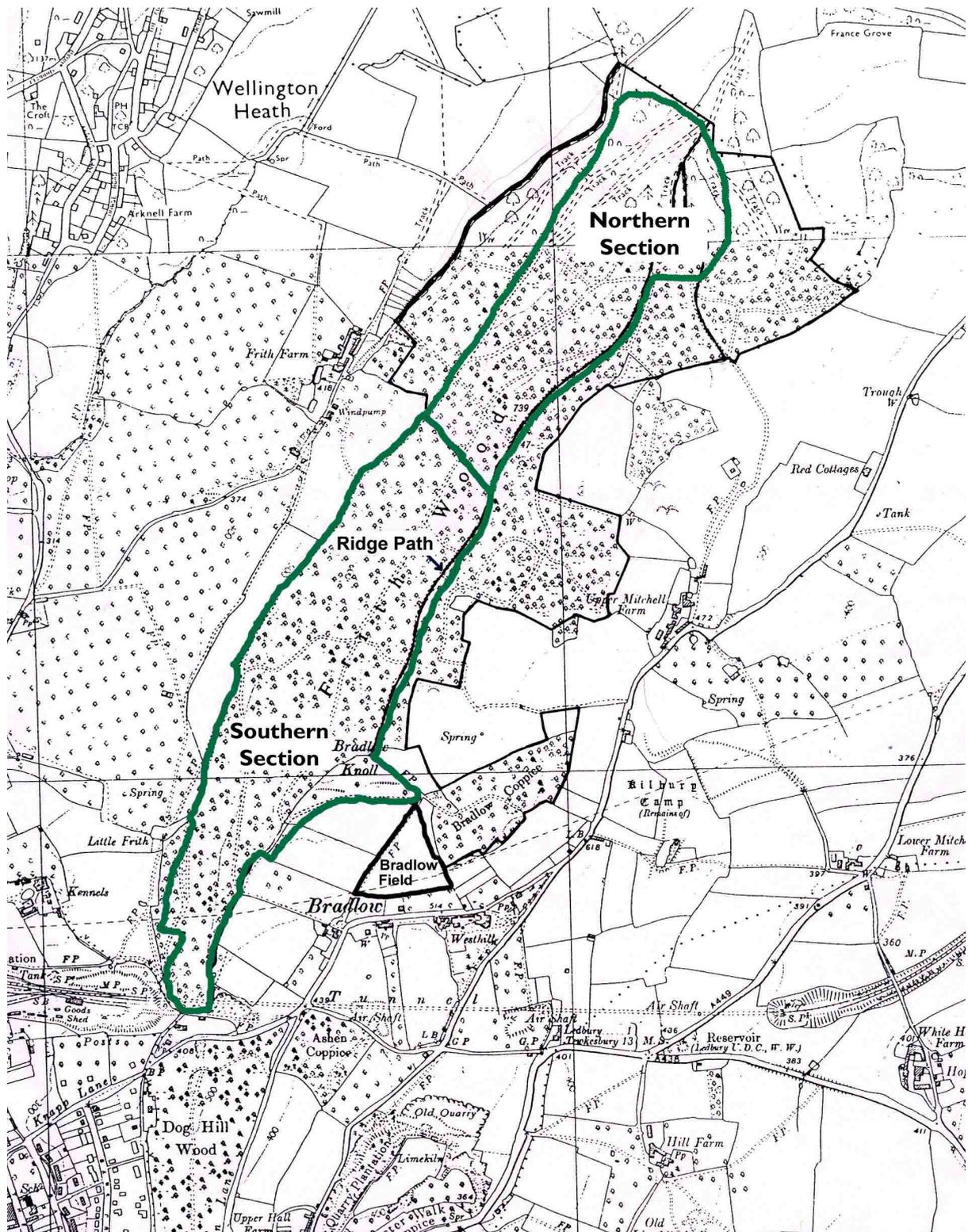
Frith Wood covers an area of about 80 hectares between SO 713385 and 724404, 1km NE of Ledbury and sits on a prominent ridge at an altitude of 100-250m. There are two public footpaths running roughly north/south and several forestry paths along the contours of the hill. It is part of the Malvern Hills AONB and is an ancient woodland site.

The wood covers an outcrop of Silurian rocks of which the prominent ridge is Aymestrey Limestone. This changes to Upper Ludlow Shales down the western slope before dipping below the Old Red Sandstone of the Leadon valley at the wood's edge.

The site has not always been entirely wooded, as there is evidence from recent archaeological surveys that in medieval times it was farmed and there are still signs of agricultural terraces suggesting the land was cleared. Subsequently it reverted to woodland, but the charcoal burning industry continued until the 1920s. The legacy of this is very few ancient trees but some old chestnut coppice.

Currently, there is a mixture of broadleaved trees and conifers and two stands of pure conifers to the east. Much of the area has considerable tree cover and little light gets to the forest floor. The rides are more open and consequently have a greater variety of plants. Forest Enterprise are managing the wood and have a long term plan to return the area to traditional mixed woodland with areas of standards and new coppice and broadleaved high forest, whilst harvesting and restocking the conifer stands at appropriate times. Work began in 2002 with clearance of most of the trees and shrub layer in the southern section of the wood. In June 2003, work continued clearing along the main rides in the northern section, especially along Godwin's Rise and West Frith Road. Some of the west facing stands of trees were also cut down. These will be left to regenerate from the stumps. Whilst there was initial disruption to the vegetation, much more light has been let in which is already benefiting the growth of plants and associated animals.

Bradlow Field is on the south facing slope of the ridge and is used as meadow for grazing stock, currently horses. It has a public footpath along the western edge which rises steeply to the stile into Frith Wood at the top and which affords extensive views over Ledbury and the surrounding area to the south.



The Survey Areas

Conducting the Survey

Volunteers from Ledbury Naturalists' Field Club met monthly as previously reported in 2002, and in 2003 on March 10th, May 12th, June 9th, July 14th, August 11th and October 4th. Unfortunately, the scheduled April meeting was washed out and in September everywhere was too dry for there to be any new interest. At each meeting, members spent about three hours walking through the northern section of the wood, mainly along the rides and smaller

footpaths and ridge path, recording all flowering plants, grasses, trees, fungi, mosses, ferns, lichens, birds, insects, spiders, slugs, snails and other invertebrates that were found. Once again, Forest Enterprise kindly allowed vehicle access to the new car park in the middle of the wood so recording time could be maximised. The May meeting focused on Bradlow field and an extra visit was made on August 18th by Peter Garnett and Michael Harper.

As in previous years, the group was fortunate to have the assistance of several well-known experts in their field, and great trouble was taken to verify each record to ensure the reliability of the survey as far as possible. However the records are no doubt less than the true story due to the limited time spent, though the 2002 list was considerably extended.

Results and Comment

The species found were recorded. Complete details can be found in Appendix 1 of this report. In summary the following numbers of species were noted.

	Flowers	Grasses Sedges Rushes	Trees	Fungi Lichens Mosses Ferns	Birds	Butterflies and Moths	Other Insects and Invertebrates
Frith Wood (2002 data)	154 (99)	33 (19)	39 (34)	135 (94)	33 (27)	26 (24)	201 (92)
Bradlow Field (2002 data)	94 (59)	20 (15)	17 (13)	10 (7)	27 (10)	27 (19)	31 (28)
Total species	178	34	40	140	37	46	223

It can be seen that a considerable number of extra species were recorded in 2003 compared with 2002, shown in brackets in the table. The values for total species recorded include ones found on both sites, and so is not a straight addition of the values for the two sites. In all 698 different species were identified.

In Frith Wood 154 flowering plants were found, an extra 55 added to the 2002 list. Most pleasing was the reappearance of the Spreading Bellflower, which had disappeared in recent years. There were several large clumps flowering well in July along the northern end of West Frith Road between the map references 712401 and 721402. It is now probably the best site for these flowers in the county. One plant of Violet Helleborine was rediscovered in the woods after a period of absence. It is an uncommon Herefordshire plant as it is at the western edge of its natural range. It is hoped that it will continue to thrive and multiply in the future. Bur Forget-me-not was a surprising find as it is a rare alien in the country. It is imported with grain and birdseed and has a Euro-Siberian temperate distribution, naturalised in North America, but rare in Western Europe. This is a first record for Herefordshire.



Spreading Bellflower

Of the other additions to the list, many were common weeds of disturbed ground, not very evident in 2002. At the top of Godwin's Rise where there is very thin soil over limestone, and good light had more lime tolerant plants such as Wild Basil, Common Spotted Orchid, Common Centaury and Zigzag Clover. Unfortunately, the clearance of the roadway by the Forest Enterprise vehicles, involved scraping off much of the topsoil and plants in this interesting corner, so it is to be hoped that they will regenerate in time. It was also good to find Wild Daffodils in this section of the wood and other favourites such as

Meadow Sweet, Brooklime and Wood Vetch. The Early Purple Orchid was found again in the southern section in the part that had been cleared in 2002.

As explained in last year's interim report, the hunt for flowering plants was based on a list made by members between 1969-1971. Though the majority of species were located and new ones added to the list, there were 42 species from the original list still not found. These are set out separately in the appendix. Some are likely to have disappeared permanently such as Common Dodder, Herb Paris and Rock Rose, though many, such as Wild Teasel, Hop Trefoil and Common Cow-wheat, may simply have been missed on survey days as they are still relatively common in the area.

Another 35 species of flowering plants were found in Bradlow field including Yarrow, Bulbous Buttercup and Perforate St. John's-wort. The Woolly Thistle continued to thrive by the stile. More grasses were found in both sites with the species reflecting the meadow or the darker and damper wood.



Wood Vetch

Only 5 new species of trees were added from the northern section of the wood. A stand of Western Red Cedar, some Alder, Downy Birch, Cherry Laurel and Privet were noted. This section of the wood does not have the ancient coppiced Chestnuts or the Small Leaved Lime found in the southern part. It has several stands of conifers, which cut out the light to the forest floor and which will be harvested in due course. The rest of the area was similar to the south with a mixture of native broadleaved trees and planted conifers.

Despite another very dry autumn, more species of fungi and other non-flowering plants were found mainly in the damper parts of the wood. These included well-known ones such as Common Inkcap, Beefsteak Fungus and St. George's Mushroom. Ones of more rarity were *Asterophora lycoperdoides*, which grows on rotting *Russula nigricans* and is not often found, *Lentinellus cochleatus*, which grows on deciduous tree stumps and is rather scarce in Herefordshire, also *Pleurotus dryinus*, an uncommon bracket fungus. The Giant Puffball is also not often found in these parts. There were 99 fungi noted in total, though doubtless more species are waiting to be found. Six lichens, 22 mosses, 5 liverworts and 8 species of fern were also identified.

More birds were spotted this year including Goshawk, Swift, Buzzard, Linnet, Goldcrest, Nuthatch and Tawny Owl. It was pleasing to hear the Cuckoo yet again, and both the Green and Greater Spotted Woodpeckers were in evidence. The list now totals 37.



Section of wood cleared in 2002

The numbers of insects identified more than doubled, helped by some good recording weather and enthusiastic collecting by John Meiklejohn. The Common Blue Butterfly, the Drinker Moth and Brown Longhorn Moth were added to the list of Lepidoptera now totalling 46. All the other groups of insects and invertebrates saw considerable extension with 29 flies, 73 beetles, 26 bugs, 15 spiders and 21 slugs and snails as well as a range of other groups. The final total was 269 species, which are listed in the appendix. Most were found along the open rides in the wood showing what a rich environment this has become.

Mammals were not formally recorded but Badgers, Grey Squirrels, Moles, Bank Voles and Wood Mice, have been seen in the wood by members. It is also thought that Muntjac Deer are in the area as their slots have been seen occasionally.

Conclusions:

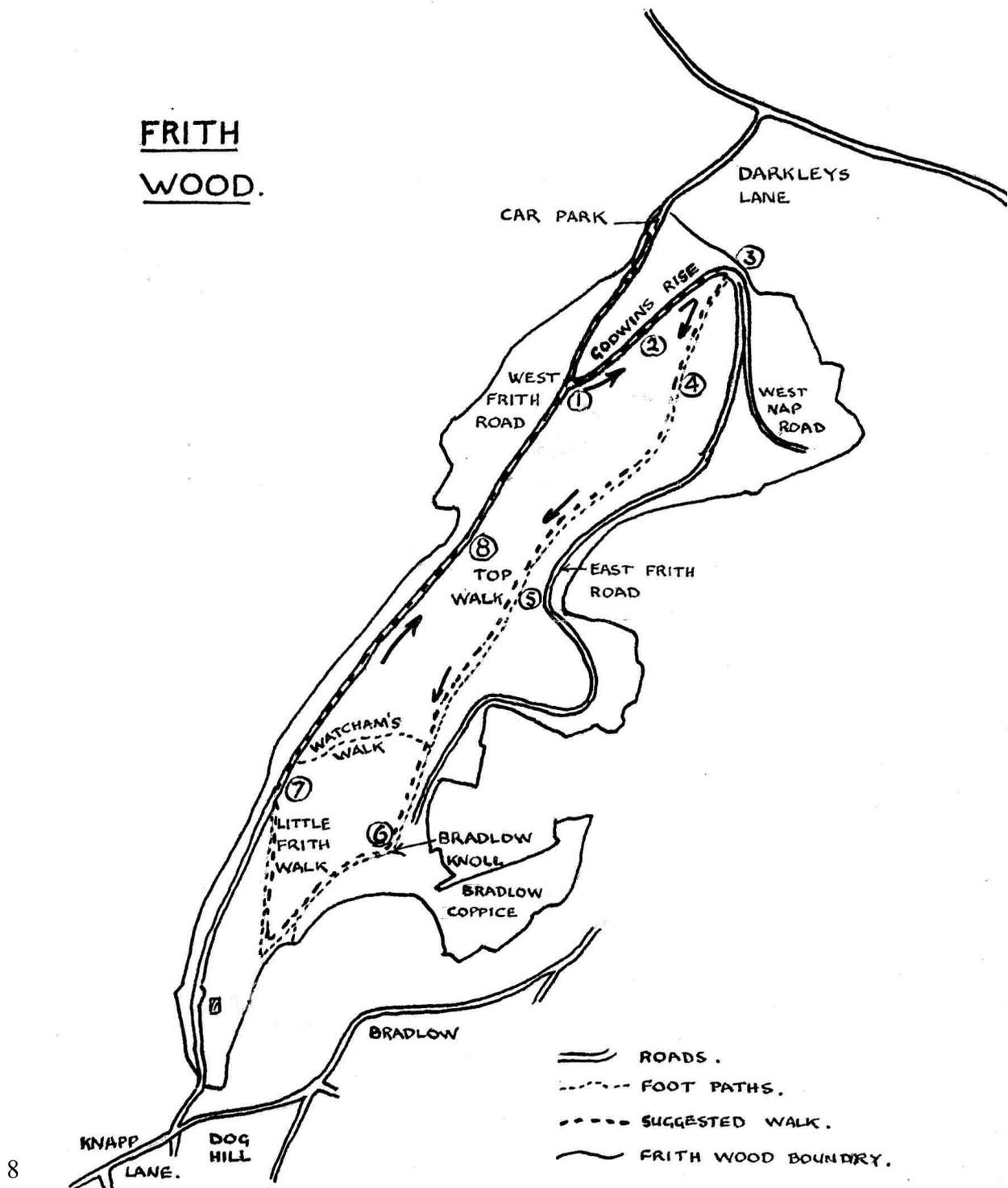
Another successful year of recording in Frith Wood by Ledbury Naturalists has shown what a rich and varied ecosystem Ledbury has on its doorstep. The management plan put into action last year by Forest Enterprise has already yielded results with the return of the Spreading Bellflower, Violet Helleborine and Early Purple Orchid. The clearance of the overgrown areas of old wood has allowed more light to reach the floor and enabled these plants and many others to grow with a corresponding increase in the insect population. The continued clearing of conifers and coppicing broadleaf trees is returning the wood to a more traditional regime where hopefully there will be a greater diversity of wildlife. Bradlow Field also showed a diversity of wild life, flowering plants, butterflies and birds in particular.

This has been an interesting project for the club, and will provide a good baseline for future

surveys as it is hoped to monitor the changes in a few years time.

Finally:

Co-operation with Forest Enterprise has been integral with the survey which is set to continue as, this year, Forest Enterprise have kindly offered to make new signs to mark the paths in the Wood. These will replace the original ones made by pupils of Ledbury County Secondary School in 1963, of which only one remains. The first new sign was erected on May 12th 2003 at the bottom of Little Frith Walk and is made of local timber by Forest Enterprise workers. The other 7 will be erected in due course using the names shown on the footpath map.



Frith Wood Footpath Map

Distribution

1. Ledbury Naturalists' Field Club.
2. Forest Enterprise
3. Herefordshire Nature Trust.
4. English Nature.
5. British Trust for Ornithology.
6. Herefordshire Ornithological Club.
7. Herefordshire Biological Records Centre
8. Colwall Parish Council
9. Ledbury Town Council
10. Colwall Library
11. Ledbury Library
12. Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club



The first new footpath sign from Forest Enterprise

Appendix 1