

FROM THE ARCHIVE: 50 YEARS AGO

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE LUNDY FIELD SOCIETY, VOLUME 26, p28

1975 Easter Working Party. Good Friday March 28th- April 2nd.

The object of this working party was to clear as many rhododendrons, which were encroaching over the top of the island, as possible. To this end a party of eight were accommodated in Signal Cottage.

On her first sailing of the season M.V. Balmoral left Ilfracombe for Lundy at 14.30 hrs. After sailing through a brief but heavy blizzard the island was sighted. What a strange and wonderful sight it was – a snow-capped Lundy.

It was felt that after a quick meal an immediate start should be made on the job in hand. The location was the rather large clump of Rhododendrons in the valley just North of Quarter Wall by the Main Track. Work continued here until 7 p.m.

Since two members of the party were also the seal experts currently working on the island, on the following day, a quick visit was made to the large cave at the bottom of Puffin Gully in order to take measurements. Here there were already about 600 Kittiwakes on their ledges. By lunchtime work had already been resumed at the Quarter Wall site and work continued until 6 p.m.

On Easter Sunday the clearing at the Quarter Wall site was completed in spite of rather un-pleasant conditions, viz. plenty of rain. The smaller patches at Ponsbury were next removed and this was completed by 6 p.m. the weather having considerably improved as the day wore on.

Easter Monday morning dawned sunny and warmer. The body of a beautiful immature Scarlet Ibis was found – however the fact that tomorrow's date was April 1st did have something to do with this remarkable discovery. Work on an extensive patch North of Three-quarter Wall was started and completed today. The ground here being drier and the root systems smaller. On the way back a small patch on the N.E. slope of Tibbetts Hill was cleared.

Tuesday April 1st saw much activity in the clearing of a large patch in the area of Quarter Wall Cottages.



▲ Lundy East Side rhododendrons and foxgloves, circa 1975 (photo: Tony Taylor)

All cut material was stacked in piles near the Main Track ready for collection, and it was on the following day that a tractor and trailer, kindly provided by the island authorities, was used for collection. The cut material was taken to the northernmost quarry to dry and was eventually safely burned the following August.

Since the party consisted mainly of “bird men” it was inevitable that observations and records should be kept. Of note during these few days was the presence of a Peregrine, the anxiety at nest sites of Lapwings, the singing of Song Thrushes, the presence of Redwings and a marked northerly movement of Pipits. April 1st produced a Chiffchaff in Millcombe.

It is hoped to continue this work in 1976 since there is much to be done.

Those taking part were Chris Baillie, Nigel Clarke, Robin Dawkins, S.G. Hedges, Tony Taylor, Constance and Rosemary Britton and the writer.

R. W. Britton

Editor's Note: This working party is thought by participants Tony Taylor and Chris Baillie to be the first one to tackle the Lundy rhododendron problem. While it's clearly Lundy, it's also clear that much has changed: the mode of transport, the now-disappeared Signal Cottage, and, thanks to the efforts of many more stalwart volunteers over the last 50 years, the number of rhododendrons! Sadly, a scarlet ibis has still not been spotted on Lundy...