

BSBI Guidance on Organising Recording Weeks

With just five years to go to obtain complete hectad coverage across the British Isles for Atlas 2020, some remote or under-recorded areas will need concerted effort. A recording week is one solution. There are many different ways to arrange such weeks but here are some ideas based on experience of organising them. The BSBI [Field Meeting Guidance](#) provides further information and risk assessment advice.

1. Planning & Preparation

Venue: You can either go for a non-residential option, where participants arrange their own accommodation or residential; for either option you will need a base that can be used by all. Choosing suitable, well-priced and located accommodation is important. Possible options might be self-catering houses, FSC or other outdoor centres, hostel-type accommodation or cheap hotels. Most folk prefer single or twin rooms in reasonable comfort. It is great socially if everyone can sit round a large table and have a meal together, either at the accommodation or in a pub. Ideally the venue will have Wifi – useful for checking weather forecasts and the BSBI DDb, etc.

Cost: Try to make the week as cheap as possible. Sometimes big private landowners or organisations like the National Trust can offer free accommodation in exchange for a survey of their land. When looking for charged accommodation, always ask for a discount on the list price – explain that we are a charity, what we are doing and why we are doing it! Fill every bed, and have a waiting list in case of late cancellations. State your cancellation policy clearly at the outset (e.g. no refunds within 4 weeks if unable to refill place.) Having a volunteer cook buy ingredients and prepare meals keeps food and drink costs down – but remember to cover the cost of the volunteer’s food in what you charge others. It’s also nice to take any volunteer cook out once during the week – perhaps the final night - to give them a night off – and to celebrate a successful week!

Cooking Arrangements (residential): Meals should be a highlight of the week. But cooking for large groups (e.g. more than 10) is pretty difficult and can be time consuming and distracting from the botany. It is better if you can arrange for the group to be catered for. In Scotland we have been able to employ a Recorder’s wife as volunteer cook (she is paid travel and other out of pocket expenses). However for smaller groups, participants could take turns at cooking, which might be a pleasant break from intensive botany, and may waste less time than eating out.

Budget: You should prepare a budget for food and accommodation for the week, and levy a charge so that even with one or two places unfilled it will still break even. Send a budget to Clive Lovatt, BSBI Admin clive.lovatt@bsbi.org for consideration. If he is happy with it, ask him to pay the deposit or the full amount for accommodation, on behalf of the BSBI.

Deciding which squares to survey: Generally it is best to shortlist target squares well in advance to allow plenty of time to prepare maps & lists of notable records, etc. Factors to consider include:

- Distance from accommodation
- Distance from road / parking (so time isn’t wasted by long walks in).
- Botanical (or geological, e.g. limestone) interest
- Contains habitats and species rare or absent elsewhere in area or hectad.
- Located in a poorly or previously under-recorded areas or hectads

Detailed Preparation: It is important that groups go out well briefed (see also the BSBI [Field Meeting Guidance](#)) and equipped with:

- At least a copy of a 1:25,000 map. It is useful to have the target square(s) clearly marked and labelled so no-one strays out of square (particularly if recording tetrads).
- A customised recording card (for the VC from the BSBI website or specific to area).
- A list of *all notable records* for the target squares from DDb or MapMate – ideally marked up
- A list of *all records* for the area (e.g. hectad) from the DDb may also be useful.

2. Advertising & Bookings

Aim: Clearly state the aim in the Yearbook and any other advertising e.g. “The aim of this field meeting is to gather records for Atlas 2020 – primarily in Wester Ross, vc105 but also in nearby parts of Westernness, vc97.” You should also make it clear that “equally important will be the mutual learning, socialising and generally having an enjoyable time!”

Botanical expertise: For any recording week to be successful you need sufficient recorder level botanists. If you have too many improvers (or beginners) it will slow progress as more time has to be spent teaching than recording. Ideally no more than 50% are enthusiastic improvers. The absolute minimum would be one recorder level botanist in each group. If you have plenty of interest, you may wish to establish what level folk are before taking their booking. It is worth stating in the advert that we are looking for recorder level or enthusiastic improvers.

Transport: Remember to consider travel arrangements and ensure there are sufficient cars (minimum one per group plus one reserve) and encourage car sharing and/or public transport.

Fitness: The required fitness level needs to be made clear at the outset. Whilst we can offer a range of different options every day – just going out botanising for 6 days in a row (never mind botanising in upland environments) can be very tiring. So state in the advert – “A reasonable level of fitness is required as we will aim to go out recording every day.” You might also mention the possibility of climbing mountains if it is a mountainous area (even in mountainous areas there needs to be at least one low level alternative on offer each day). Having given that warning, at the beginning of the week you should reiterate that folk are there to enjoy themselves – not to totally tire themselves out, and if they want or need to take time out, or finish early – they should do so (but let others know). Remember the fun bit.

Taking bookings: Create a bookings spreadsheet, and once you confirm those interested have a place ask for payment straight away. You could ask for deposits but that is twice the amount of work, and it is better just to ask for the full amount at the outset. Cheques made payable to the “BSBI”. Confirm and thank folk on receipt of cheques. Batch cheques up and send to Clive Lovatt, BSBI Admin, 57 Walton Road, Shirehampton, Bristol BS11 9TA.

Joining Information: Shortly after taking bookings and again nearer the time, you need to send out joining information. This ought to include:

- Aim of the week
- Directions to the accommodation, arrival and departure times
- Domestic & field work arrangements
- A checklist of equipment (both what the Organiser is bringing and what participants should bring), clothing and footwear and a reminder about BSBI Insurance.

An example is appended - feel free to plagiarise!

3. Organising the Week

Introductory Talk: It is always good to kick off the week on the first evening with an illustrated introductory talk from the local VCR about the area and its flora. Then in an introductory briefing cover and discuss the following points:

- What the aim of the week is: reminding folk that they are there to enjoy themselves!
- Domestic arrangements
- Recording arrangements
- Transport arrangements
- Health & Safety briefing (including warnings about ticks, simple slips and trips, etc)

Organising Field Work: It is generally best to go out in small groups of threes and fours (i.e. a carload) and aim to record one tetrad or one or two monads in a day. Bigger groups are less efficient in terms of skill use, while smaller groups may lack skill. Getting the right mix of recorder level and improvers in each group is important. From the H&S point of view three is a good minimum in case someone has to go and get help. Ideally you want to change the groups around from day to day so everyone goes out with everyone else and also sees different habitats – which is much more sociable and enjoyable.

Aim to offer a mix of difficulty levels each day, but leave the choice to the night before when you can see up to date weather forecasts. Do exposed coasts, upland and montane squares at the first opportunity when the weather is good. On days when the forecast is particularly bad choose low and sheltered habitats, if possible. If *really* bad you might want to suggest the group stays indoors and catches up with identifying specimens. Always have a wet day plan in reserve (sites near cafes, etc).

Evenings: After (or before) dinner it's good to get improvers looking at the collected specimens with recorder-level folk with the help of microscopes, keys and guides, (which the organiser will need to arrange to provide) and reviewing and tidying up their recording cards. I also like to arrange for each group to give a short (5 minute) talk on their day, most interesting or unusual finds (botanical and non-botanical). Folk often say this is one of most enjoyable parts of the week. These talks can be illustrated with maps and photos if there is a digital projector available. It's important this is not too late as folk will be tired after their day(s) out. Say 9.30pm-ish.

Reporting and digitisation: It is good if this can be done straightaway. Ideally each group leader would write a short note about their day, including (as a *minimum*) who was in the group and where the group went. Otherwise, if there are any queries participants will have long forgotten. A report for the Yearbook with the key findings is always read with keen interest.

Specimens: Arrange for them to be sent to the referees with record details.

Delegation: With so much to organise it's important for the organiser to delegate as much as possible. None of the participants will mind helping.

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Hello!

BSBI Scottish Recording Week: Glen Shiel Lodge on Sunday 29th June– Sunday 6 July 2014

Thank you for booking on the 2014 Scottish Recording Week.

This year's Scottish Recording week will be based at Shiel Bridge, Kintail, the most southerly district of Wester Ross and only a few miles from the Glenelg peninsula in Westernness. These areas are remote from their recorders, Duncan Donald and Ian Strachan, and include a rich variety of coastal, grassland, woodland, aquatic, upland and mountainous habitats.

We will be based at the splendid Shiel Lodge (www.glenshieestate.com) near Shiel Bridge at the head of Loch Duich. There are two double rooms; four twin rooms, one triple bedroom and one single room and an extra bed can be fitted in the triple room.

Aim: The aim of this field meeting is to gather records for Atlas 2020 – primarily in Wester Ross, vc105 but also in nearby parts of Westernness, vc97. But equally important will be the mutual learning, socialising and generally having an enjoyable time!

Directions: From the south, take the A82 from Fort William and turn onto the A87, signposted Kyle of Lochalsh. Or from the north on the A82, turn right onto the A887 at Invermoriston.

After about 33 miles (either way) enter Shiel Bridge. Go past entrance to Shiel Bridge Caravan & Camping site, Shiel Shop and petrol filling station and after 500m turn next left, signposted Glenelg Scenic Route. Cross Shiel Bridge and 180 metres from main road, where the road veers round to the right, go straight ahead and through the stone gateposts. Follow track round to left and park at rear.

Arrival Time: I will arrive at 1700 and welcome arrivals between from then until 1900. We will aim to eat at 1900 so please arrive before then! Please let me know if you are going to be late and we *may* save some food for you! My phone number is [phone number].

Introductory Talks: I will give a welcome talk after dinner on the first evening. During which we will discuss domestic arrangements, survey method & arrangements, collecting and identifying specimens and health & safety. Afterwards, Ian Strachan, Joint Recorder for Westernness and Duncan Donald, Recorder for Wester Ross will give an illustrated talk about the flora of the area.

Meals: Hilary Hawker is again kindly offering her services as food buyer and cook. She does this without recompense but her place and travel expenses are covered and paid for by the BSBI. You should note that she is only the cook **not** the cleaner, table layer, waitress, dish washer or general servant and I would expect *everyone* to take their turn in helping!!

Breakfasts will be at 0800 and dinners will be at 1900 each day. Materials will be set out at breakfast time for making your own packed lunches. On the final evening (Saturday the 5th July) we will take Hilary out for dinner to a local restaurant (cook's night off!)

Field Work: We will generally go out in small groups of threes and fours (a carload), leaving about 0900 or 0915. Each team will record one tetrad in a day. With 16 of us in total that means 4 or 5 teams will go out each day and we cover as much ground as possible. At least one team will go into Westernness every day but the main effort will focus on Wester Ross.

Both recorders have prepared a list of tetrads and information about each of them. We will decide which squares to visit each morning depending on the forecast. As I previously said, a reasonable level of fitness will be required but a range of different ability routes will be on offer each day. Each group will include at least one 'expert' and we will try to arrange the groups differently every day so everyone goes out with everyone else at least once over the week.

Field Recording: We want you to record in monads within tetrads using the provided Recording Cards. We will discuss and agree the precise method at the outset. It is important that all Rare & Scarce species are given full details (including a detailed grid ref) on the front of the record card.

Local specialities: We will arrange a group trip to see the local specialities such as the *Carex salina* – just a few miles away.

Departure Time: We have the lodge for the whole of Sunday 6th July, our departure day. Folk can leave as soon as we've all helped to clean and tidy the house up. However, depending on the weather, and how far folk have to travel, some may like to mop up another square?

Equipment Checklist: here is a list of some of things you should remember to bring.

- Boots & Wellies
- Waterproof jacket and trousers
- Spare warm top (fleece or similar)
- Warm, waterproof hat and gloves
- Sunglasses, sun hat, sun cream and lip sunblock
- Sandwich box, flask, water bottle
- Hand-lens, Weatherwriter or clipboard, notebook, pen, pencils, etc
- Mobile phone, GPS, camera and chargers / spare batteries, Binoculars

If available/possible:

- OS Map of the local area (but we will supply maps of the target tetrads)
- Your preferred plant identification books

What you do not need to bring:

- Bed linen and towels are provided.
- Specialist id books
- Microscope

Insurance: Remember that, as usual on all BSBI field meetings, those attending do so at their own risk. We will however explain what these risks are likely to be at the outset.