



The Ladder Cladonia

Cladonia cervicornis ssp. *verticillata*

Mac Pitcher

With its surreal resemblance to miniature castles, this attractive member of the family Cladoniaceae is both a common and easily recognized terrestrial lichen with a world-wide distribution. Look for it on thin soil and open ground in well-lit locations in heathlands and old fields throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Ladder Cladonia, often referred to by a shortened Latin binomial, *Cladonia verticillata*, is considered a Cup *Cladonia* lichen. This gray-green to burnished brown fruticose lichen with an indistinct squamulose base can stand up to 7 centimetres in height. It is unique for its pagoda-like structure, where a tiered series of shallow, flared cups arise vertically from the cup centres immediately below, often resulting in a stack of four or more turret-like cups. Indeed, the name Pagoda Lichen sounds

more appropriately descriptive than does the lackluster title, Ladder Lichen. Small brownish apothecia may be found on short projections arising from the cup margins.

Although the Ladder Lichen is a very distinctive and easily-recognised species, as is often the case with lichens, there is another lookalike species to be aware of. *Cladonia rappii*, the Slender Ladder Lichen, resembles a more slender version of the Ladder Lichen, with a thinner diameter of the cup stems, usually half that of the Ladder *Cladonia*. It also usually occurs on acidic bogs. Although we have an abundance of such bogs in this province, it is uncertain whether the Slender Ladder Lichen occurs this far north, and some suspected occurrences have later been determined to be the common Ladder Lichen.