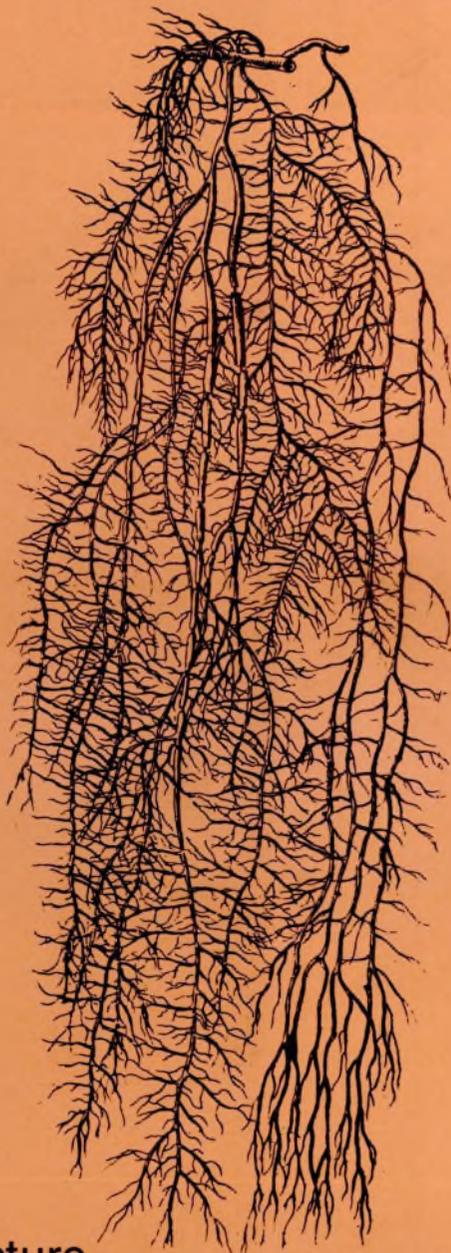


No. 63
Winter 1988

**BRITISH
LICHEN
SOCIETY
BULLETIN**



Edited by O. L. Gilbert
Dept. of Landscape Architecture,
The University, Sheffield S10 2TN

new is a small triumph, and also two of my favourites turn up, Lecanora crenulata and Xanthoria elegans. A quick count gives 49 and I wish I had my chemicals, particularly C, a saxicolous habitat needs C. That Lecidella scabra should be checked and the white smudge that might be Trapeliopsis placodioides. Nothing more for five minutes, despite an inspection of the lightning-conductor. I look up and for the first time notice the half-timbered and thatched cottages flanking the churchyard and a wall covered with honeysuckle. Bird song now penetrates my world as concentration wanes and the beautiful morning shines in. I return down Quay Lane hoping to find breakfast well advanced or, if no one is up, I'll make a pot of tea and then read my book. I'm in a good mood.

FURTHER NEGLECTED HABITATS: HEAVY METAL OUTLIERS

Heavy metal tolerant lichens have been well described recently in both the Bulletin and the Lichenologist. Lead, zinc and copper mines are now a compulsory stop for anybody investigating the flora of a particular area. What is perhaps less appreciated is the extent to which spoil from these mines has been spread about the countryside. Its value as a weed killer seems to have been recognised for a long time. The Cambrian Railway Company made widespread use of spoil from the Van Lead Mines at Llanidloes in Montgomery, so that 25 years after the railway closed, tracks over 30 miles away from the mine in S. Radnor are still relatively weed free, and support communities of lichens very reminiscent of lead mine spoil tips, eg Veizdaea leprosa, V. retigera and Steinia geophana. Fifty-five years after spreading lead mine spoil on his drive, a land-owner from near Rhayader testified to the fact that he hasn't had to remove a weed from the drive since. The effect of this material is therefore likely to be very long-lasting.

In many areas of mid-Wales the Forestry Commission, private woodland companies and farmers have made use of lead mine spoil as a top dressing for farm and forestry tracks. Veizdaea acicularis

was described as a new species from just such a track in the Towi valley, Carmarthen, recently. Quite what impact this dispersed heavy metal rich spoil is having on the environment generally I do not like to contemplate, and certainly would not encourage its use. But as it is there I am happy to crawl on hands and knees investigating a clump of sick- looking moss here and a bare- looking patch there!

The metals from these and other mines have found wide use and their toxic effects on lichens are readily seen below flashings on roofs and galvanised wire on posts etc. Where the doses are sub-lethal, lead, zinc and copper tolerant species of lichen can be found. Churches are regularly reported as supporting notable species, eg Psilolechia leprosa below copper window grills and adjacent to lightning-conductors. Less frequently noted has been the sublethal effect of the humble galvanised fence or iron water tank. If the soil is naturally acidic below the fence or tank, and fairly nutrient poor the zinc concentration may be enough to suppress the higher plants and allow mosses such as Barbula convulata, Ceratodon purpureus and Pohlia nutans to grow, favoured prey of Vezdaea spp. V. leprosa seems to be the commonest colonist with V. rheocarpa as a notable rarity.

So keep an open mind as to the possibility of heavy metal contamination anywhere where higher plants are doing less well than might normally be expected or where unexpected quantities of heavy metal tolerant species such as common bent (Agrostis capillaris) occur to the exclusion of other plants. The metal mines may have extended their influence further than you thought.

Ray Woods