

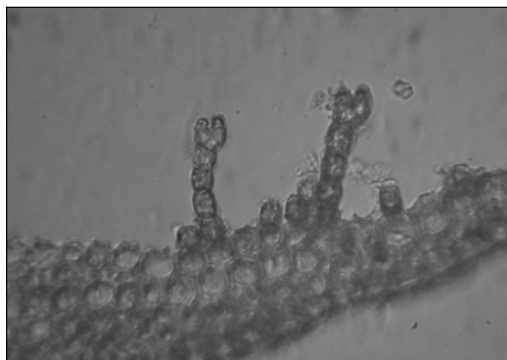
A new species record for Troopers Hill - *Polytrichum commune* var. *commune* (Common Haircap) Nick Hudson 20/01/2007

On a visit to Troopers Hill in late 2006 I found a large *Polytrichum* moss which initially looked rather like *Polytrichum commune* - a moss of wet heaths and moors. A second visit confirmed these suspicions and subsequent study showed the moss to definitely be *Polytrichum commune* var. *commune* (this identification has been confirmed by Sam Bosanquet, a professional bryologist).

This appears to be not only a new species record for Troopers Hill but for the wider Bristol area as well.

The new moss found on the hill is one of two varieties of a species of moss. The "species" moss is known as *Polytrichum commune*. This is sub-divided into the two varieties - *Polytrichum commune* var. *commune* and *Polytrichum commune* var. *perigoniale*. The two varieties can be told apart by the shape of the uppermost cells of the leaf (actually the apical lamellae cells) which in *Polytrichum commune* var. *commune* are grooved (see photo below).

Polytrichum commune is one of the largest mosses found in the UK having the potential to reach up to 40cm tall. It can cover large areas of ground in copious quantity. In general it is a moss of damp moors and heath. Although Troopers Hill supports some heathland the occurrence of this moss here is rather intriguing as it falls outside of the main range of *P. commune*. There are some records from the Forest of Dean but it is only found very sparingly on our side of the River Severn (Peter Martin).



Grooved apical lamellae cells of *Polytrichum commune* var. *commune*



The moss on Troopers Hill

Sites for *Polytrichum commune* var. *commune* on Troopers Hill.

“The Gully”, on north-facing, steep bank at ST62997308.

Polytrichum commune var. *commune* grows here at a low frequency in several small patches (approx. 20- 30 plants in each patch) and as scattered individual plants. The plants here are all relatively small and as of the 20/01/2007 showed no obvious signs of sporophytes (reproductive growth).

The steep slope behind the Nursery, (west-facing) at ST62887295.

Polytrichum commune var. *commune* occurs here in some abundance with several almost pure stands covering approx. 2 metre square. In addition to this there are numerous small, scattered patches. Some of the plants in the larger stands have **sporophytes**.

In both of these places *Polytrichum commune* var. *commune* occurs in Wavy Hair-grass (*Deschampsia flexuosa*) dominated grassland associated with a large foliose lichen species.

Although the sites where this moss is found don't appear to be under any imminent threat there are several potentially invasive species which grow adjacent to or in the areas that *Polytrichum commune* var. *commune* is found. These are Holm Oak, Bramble and Ivy. In the Gully Ivy could possibly be a future threat. At the Nursery site there were a number of Holm Oak seedlings. This species poses a potential threat due to colonisation and subsequent succession.