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Edited by J. S. Rodwell

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British Plant Communities

VOLUME 2

MIRES AND HEATHS

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for the

UK Joint Nature Conservation Committee



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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The formulation of our proposals for mires and heaths, which make up this second volume of *British Plant Communities*, occupied much of the middle years of the National Vegetation Classification project, when the enthusiasm of the research team could so easily have flagged and the financial support of the Nature Conservancy Council been put in jeopardy but for a continuing faith in the quality and value of the results.

As coordinator of the project and editor of the work, I owe a special and very substantial debt in the preparation of the accounts of the mire communities to Michael Proctor. With Paul Wilkins, the research assistant who worked under his supervision with great industry and wit, Michael undertook the analysis of a very large body of data collected by our own team together with numerous samples from existing work, and he prepared preliminary descriptions of most of the vegetation types. Both in these earlier stages and later, when together we shaped the proposals into a coherent whole and I completed the writing of the community accounts, I was enormously informed by Michael's experience of mire ecology and his always thoughtful comments on the developing scheme.

As the classification emerged, we were both helped greatly by the prodigious efforts of Dr Hilary Birks who, on secondment to the team for a brief period, confirmed the integrity of many of the vegetation types in a parallel analysis of upland data. Among other workers, we are especially grateful to Dr Bryan Wheeler, not just for his generosity in allowing us unhindered access to his numerous data from base-rich mires, but also for the open-hearted way in which he shared his understanding of mire vegetation and gave us enthusiastic critical comments.

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For the presentation of our heath data, responsibility among our team fell to David Shimwell who, with the diligent support of his research assistant Elaine Radford, came to grips nobly with large numbers of newly-collected samples, together with many existing data from maritime cliffs contributed by Andrew Malloch, and from the uplands, for which latter we were again fortunate to have a preliminary analysis from Hilary Birks. David always kept up his cheerful encouragement as I continued work on the preliminary community accounts that he prepared and I was spurred on by his enthusiasm for understanding even our most neglected kinds of heath vegetation.

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As our schemes for heaths and mires gained currency within the NCC and other organisations in these final years of the project, I have been especially encouraged by the spirited reception they received on the training courses which I ran with Michael Proctor in the New Forest and the Galloway hills. The kind of enthusiasm we encountered there from staff of the NCC, the National Trust, the Macaulay Institute and the Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland), individuals too

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Preface

numerous to name here, has helped carry through the work into these last arduous days and bodes well for the implementation of the proposals.

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John Rodwell

Lancaster