

Sproughton, a Microscopists Oasis?



Coming off the A14 in sleeting rain at Sproughton, I arrived into the bustle of the Eastern Region Microscopy meeting to the promise of an alternative and sunnier day in the company of that erudite species, the Microscopist. In fact, the days presentations, woven together in a tale, illustrate the point.

What would be an extreme contrast to the day's rain? Landing in a desert! - Where Duncan Edmonds presents the perfect literary accompaniment with his recommended reading "Grains of Sand". Around us would be the cacti which, as Bill Morris demonstrates, provide fascinating material for a hand-lens or stereo microscope. Naturally, we hurry to the nearest oasis where Norah Arnold advises on the rotifers and algae populating the cool waters and Eddy Smith introduces us to the proliferating Hydra, including his live example - with no less than 8 buds!

Refreshed and sitting in the shade of passionflowers, we ponder on the intricate patterns and sutures on its delicately sculptured pollen with Victor Diss; the pollinating bees buzzing in the nearby hive kept in good health through Peter Sunderland's control of their parasites and enlivened with the fortuitous discovery of rare beetle species living in this unique habitat.

Scratching your head, you would hopefully not encounter lice, whose muscles glow iridescently when viewed using my polarisers, and, should you have to extricate an earwig from your anatomy, you can at least follow Ron Cushing's time saving advice to steep the wings for 3months in Safranin instead of 6, to avoid over staining.

Obviously you would need a microscope, so pop into the local desert Lidl for the economy Biolux AL tested by Peter Nicholson. Robert Hooke himself recommended the 17th Century candle and flask illuminator as demonstrated by Lewis Woolnough, alternatively, we'll use electricity to power John Garrett's high power LED lighting, tailored for each purpose. Of course Barry Ellam tests the set up with a difficult diatom in the extremely high (R.I. 1.9) refractive mountant Realgar and plays with his newly acquired darkfield illuminator. Make sure though, if using a stereo microscope, that you follow Stephen Livermore's tip for optimising the sample-lens-camera alignment in order to get the best photographs.

For an evening's entertainment at this exotic location, we invite over Les Larkman to slice rocks on his proud new acquisition, the hand driven rock section cutter or enjoy a virtuoso performance by our host Ernie Ives on sectioning (empty) snail shells and preparing thin slides using an ingenious array of simple yet effective devices and tools. All this with a banquet of Barry's sumptuous spread of rich cakes!

And so, an afternoon passed quickly and enjoyably. For us, microscopy is in our DNA. Hogwash? No, Mouthwash! – Today Mike Gibson showed us how to extract the DNA from the latter if we needed to prove it!

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Photos available at
http://picasaweb.google.co.uk/miltoncontact/SproughtonMicroscopyMeeting?authkey=K8Wics56O_w