

Asplenium septentrionale (L.) Hoffm.

Forked Spleenwort

Native

Near Threatened

Nationally Scarce

VC5 Extinct; VC6 Absent ?

An evergreen fern of exposed acidic rock faces and walls. Formerly known from a few sites around Porlock, on Exmoor (VC5). Found in plentiful quantities in 1840 by Mr N. Ward on loose stone walls in the parish of Culbone. Also found in profusion in 1842 by Rev. W.S. Hore on a loose stone wall north of the church in the adjacent parish of Oare and later, in 1875, Mr Jeffcott found this species to be plentiful on loose shale by the side of a path leading up the hill by Lord Lovelace's woods at Porlock Weir. Once these localities became known, thousands of plants were uprooted for sale by the fern collector Potter and by 1893 the species had become so rare that the locality of the remaining plants was kept a secret. In 1916, N.G. Hadden recorded this species on old walls near Porlock; however it suffered severely in the drought of 1921. In 1923, W.D. Miller could find only three plants on Ley Hill. He later wrote that the species "maintains its hold in one spot, though in some years there are only two or three plants" (Miller, 1933). In 1939, Hadden wrote that the 17 plants he first observed in that locality had dwindled to only one. That was the last report of *Asplenium septentrionale* in Somerset and although there have been extensive searches since then, no further plants have been found and the species must be considered extinct. In VC6, the only record of this species is its inclusion (as "Filix saxatilis Tragi") in a list of plants seen at Cheddar by Dillenius in July, 1726, when on his journey into Wales. There is no specimen in his herbarium and the record has never been corroborated. White (1912) seemed reluctant to dismiss it as a mistake; however Roe (1981) stated that it was "probably an error as the plant is a calcifuge". With a distribution restricted to scattered sites in Scotland, northern England and Wales, this species was near its southern limit in Somerset.