

***Gymnocarpium dryopteris* (L.) Newman Oak Fern**

Native

GB: Least Concern

England: Near Threatened

VC5 Rare; VC6 Lost

A creeping, rhizomatous deciduous fern of shaded rocky stream banks, damp rocky woodland and stable scree slopes. Always rare in Somerset, it is now only found at two sites. In VC5, first recorded by Murray (1896) on rocks by the River Barle, above Landacre Bridge. Green *et al.* (1997) reported that it persisted “in a very small quantity”, but although sixteen fronds were found at this site in 2002, none have been found since, despite extensive searches. Marshall (1919) gave a record for this species on a bank over the Exe, shown to W.S. Price in 1908, but with no further details. A new site for VC5 was found by Paul Green in 1994, when he discovered this species in abundance along a stretch of the rocky bank of the River Quarme, where it still flourishes. Long extinct in VC6, Oak Fern was listed in Shiercliff’s Guide of 1789 as rare in Leigh Woods, but last recorded there in 1839 by T.B. Flower, who saw it with other ferns in a damp hollow, then known as “Fern Glen”, near Rownham (White, 1912). When White searched for it, the site had been enclosed and the ferns were gone. There have been a few other records for VC6, for example Sole’s record “In the chinks of the garden steps at Widcombe-house” (Collinson, 1791), but they were probably all errors for *Gymnocarpium robertianum*. Widespread in Scotland, northern England and Wales, this species is at its southern limit in Somerset; the only other probably native location in southern England was a newly discovered site in Surrey (Rumsey, 2008a), where it was last seen in 2012. This species has declined at the edges of its range.



Gymnocarpium dryopteris beside River Quarme (2009). Photo: HJC

VC5

Landacre Bridge	SSSI	SS815362	2002	CJG	16 fronds on rocky outcrop
River Quarme	SSSI	SS87494008	2019	GEL	c.300 fronds over 30m of S bank of river
River Quarme	SSSI	SS87554006	2019	GEL	37 on steep rocky slope on S bank of river



Distribution of *Gymnocarpium dryopteris* in Somerset, mapped using MapMate.
Black dots are post-2000 records; pink squares are 1987-1999 records