Book Review

The Flora of Mull.* For the devotee of that institution, the local flora, this work offers a rare and truly gargantuan feast. Apart from the account of the flowering plants there are also sections on the ferns and their allies, bryophytes, lichens, fungi and freshwater and marine algae. Indeed, the British Museum is the only institution that has the expertise and the necessary call on outside specialists to tackle a project of these proportions.

The Island of Mull, off the west coast of Scotland, with its immediate offshore islands including Iona, Staffa, the Treshnish Islands and Ulva, was selected because it offered sufficient interest, particularly with its strongly oceanic terrestrial flora, in all the groups of plants studied within a relatively small area (450 sq. miles of land mass) to make this a feasible and worthwhile undertaking within the five-year period over which field work was carried out.

Inevitably some of the plant groups have been surveyed more intensively than have the remainder. One of course realises that the treatments that the different plant groups have received have been to some extent dictated by their differing life styles and by the relative difficulties encountered during the identification of the respective species. The editors are therefore to be congratulated for producing such a coherent text from the very disparate accounts that they must have received for the different groups.

The flowering plants and conifers (by E. B. Bangerter & J. F. M. Cannon) were recorded on a 2 × 2 km square grid, though their distributions are summarised in the text using 17 areas delimited topographically. The critical genera, *Rubus* and *Hieracium*, have received adequate, if not exhaustive, attention. For both the bryophytes (A. Eddy) and the lichens (P. W. James), the surveys were conducted to give a comprehensive cover for the islands. The resulting extensive lists reflect this though they are probably not as complete as are those for the higher plants. The account for the fungi (D. M. Henderson & R. Watling) is not presented in a strictly comparable format and I am sure that the authors would not claim to have recorded more than 70% of the total fungal flora. Nevertheless, the lists are probably uniquely comprehensive in the range of species recorded, including microscopic species as well as the more obvious larger ascomycetes and basidiomycetes. The five-year spread of field-work has clearly overcome many of the problems of ephemerality associated with the recording of fungi. D. J. Hibbard and Patricia Sims (diatoms) have presented lists of the freshwater algae. These lists are probably the most incomplete due largely to the difficulties posed by their identification. The marine algae were sampled from over 100 sites around the shores of the islands and the lists presented by J. H. Price & I. Tittley and by T. B. B. Paddock are certainly full and detailed.

For those that require more than just lists of plant records, there are also detailed accounts of the geology, geomorphology and soils, climate and the marine physical environment and it is gratifying to note the efforts that have been made to correlate the vegetation with the soil types recognized. This leads on to full accounts of the marine, brackish and freshwater, and terrestrial ecosystems of Mull. The wide range of expertise available has been intelligently used to produce interestingly integrated accounts of the plant communities represented, involving most of the plant groups surveyed. If any criticism is to be made, however, then it must be said that the ecological notes on the bryophytes do appear to be the weak link.

To what extent further, more esoteric, analysis of the results is intended is not made clear, though with the wealth of data that is obviously available there must be ample scope. We are given a not-too-happy glimpse of what is possible in a computer analysis of the distribution patterns of the flowering plant flora based on Matthewsian Elements. This is not, however, and should not be, a very important part of such a basic account as this.

This book is not for the casual reader, especially with a price tag of £28. I must admit that I am left with a feeling of a certain *Folie de Grandeur*, but then the survey was, I understand conceived partly as a training excercise for British Museum Staff. Yet, despite this, I am aware that we are not likely to see as comprehensive and wide-ranging an account for any similar area of the British Isles again.

This work stands as an example of what can be achieved and is going to be an obligatory work of reference for the study of the Scottish flora for a long time to come.

D. F. Chamberlain

* *The Island of Mull—a survey of its flora and environment*. A. C. Jermy & J. A. Crabbe (Eds.). 130 figs., xxvi, 605 pp. 1978. [ISBN 0 565 00791 2]. British Museum (Natural History). £28.