

# THE ROCK GARDEN 132



January 2014

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# The Rock Garden

The Journal of the  
Scottish Rock Garden Club  
January 2014

## Number 132

Cover: *Coprosma petriei* (Peter Maguire)

**36 Adventures in Sagarmatha National Park**

– Doug Logan



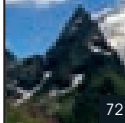
**50 Exploring the Arctic by Cruise Ship**

– Michael Scott



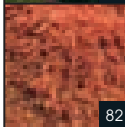
**72 In the Mountains of Circassia (II)**

– Michael Almond



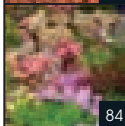
**82 65 ... But not Retiring!**

– Christine Boulby



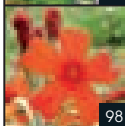
**84 Putting on the SRGC Shows**

– Sandy Leven, Stan da Prato & Graham Wenham



**98 A Plantsman's Paradise Revisited**

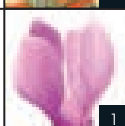
– Gordon Rae



1 Discussion Weekend 2014

3 Shows

94 Book Reviews



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The Editor welcomes articles, photographs and illustrations on any aspects of alpine and rock garden plants and their cultivation. Authors are encouraged to submit material electronically but articles may also be submitted in manuscript. Digital images are particularly welcome but 35 mm slides, high quality prints or drawings may also be submitted.

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The normal deadlines for contributions are 1 November for the January issue and 1 April for the July issue. These dates also apply for material for the Yearbook & Show Schedules.

Journals usually arrive in February or August. Please contact the Subscriptions Secretary in case of non arrival (see inside front cover).

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## The Discussion Weekend

3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> October 2014

After the success of last year's excursion to North Scotland, the organizing team once again invites you to Grantown-on-Spey for yet more Highland hospitality. The planned town, built in 1766 by Sir James Grant of Castle Grant, features a broad High Street with the town square and our hotel at its northern end. Almost unique amongst Scottish towns, it has no chain stores, just a range of independent shops, cafes and bars. It is a small town and, having suffered little from modern housing developments, still enjoys its peaceful location amongst woodlands alongside the River Spey. It must be good for the spirit because locals still smile at strangers in the street!

Last year's participants were delighted with the Grant Arms Hotel, built as part of the original town and located in the middle of the square. Recent refurbishments ensure a very high standard of comfort. As well as being guests of the Grant Arms we are also guests of the Bird Watchers and Wildlife Club (BWWC, [www.bwwc.co.uk](http://www.bwwc.co.uk)) and all of their facilities are available to delegates. The hotel is cosy, having forty-eight rooms, two of which have been converted to suit disabled guests, while six are available as single rooms. When all the rooms in the Grant Arms have been filled, delegates will be placed in the equally pleasant eighteen bedroom Garth Hotel just a hundred metres away across the square.

Delegates arriving by car should leave the A9 at Aviemore and follow the A95 to and through Grantown. The hotel is on the right of the square. If you are coming by public transport we recommend the scenic train journey through the Grampian Mountains to Aviemore and then onwards by the frequent bus service to Grantown square.

Saturday morning is, as usual, free time for delegates and organizers to enjoy arranged visits. At Grantown we have a problem – there is just so much to recommend! Firstly, the Grant Arms is the base for Bird Watchers and Wildlife Club which will provide guides to take you on a wildlife walk in the neighbouring Anagach Woods and by the River Spey. Both long and short walks are planned. Did you know that there is a native plant garden located at 600 metres on Cairngorm mountain? The gardener will be waiting at Cairngorm to tell you all about his garden, after which you might like to ride the funicular to the Ptarmigan Station to see the views and enjoy the world famous hot chocolate.

We suggest that Grantown is a place to come for a longer break, with the Discussion Weekend as the 'jewel in the crown'; there is just so much to see and do. If you interested in fishing, we can arrange a day on the River Spey - but remember that the season ends on 30th September. If golf is your or your partner's secret vice, Grantown has its own magnificent eighteen-hole course; or you can drive up to Nairn to try the two links courses. Even if you don't spend your extra days at the Grant Arms the BWWC people will gladly help you plan your time up here in the Highlands.

We are delighted to keep the cost to £198 per person for the weekend for two persons sharing (see the Secretary's pages for full price details and booking form). Thursday night or Sunday night or both are available at £65 DB&B per person per night. Outside this period the Grant Arms will welcome your company at its normal rate.

We look forward to seeing you all in October. If you have any questions or queries please contact Carol Shaw ([srgcsec@googlemail.com](mailto:srgcsec@googlemail.com)).

Beware! Last year the Discussion Weekend was very quickly fully booked; please make your reservation as soon as you decide to come.

## Programme


The 2014 Discussion weekend programme's two themes intertwine the Himalayas and the Americas. This year's speakers include some well-known faces and four speakers new to Scotland.

On Friday, **John Amand** will give the bulb lecture, talking on woodland bulbs and the route from nursery to garden. The talk will be followed by the small bulb exchange.

Saturday starts with optional woodland walks and the show. After lunch, **Ian Christie** begins our talks by describing the new developments with *Meconopsis*. **Kit Strange** is on the alpine staff at Kew and will talk on the joint Kew-Falklands native conservation project. **Nicola Ripley** is Director of the Betty Ford Alpine Gardens in Vail, Colorado, and will talk about their development and their interesting features. Saturday evening comprises the reception, dinner and plant auction.

Sunday starts with **Arve Elvebakk**, Director of the Tromsø Botanic Gardens in Norway; Vail and Tromsø are respectively the highest and northernmost botanic gardens in the world. **Michal Hoppel**, from Poland, is a keen grower of alpines, with a special interest in crevices and Asteraceae. **Stephanie Ferguson** gardens in Calgary, Canada, using crevice garden techniques to grow a wide range of rare plants. For each of the four latter speakers, this will be their first speaking engagement in Scotland, so their talks promise us interesting new viewpoints. Finally, **Tim Lever** will round off the weekend with the tale of his expedition to Arunchal Pradesh.





**O**ur club reflects many passions and enthusiasms. We grow, explore and show. We organize talks, visits, parties and conferences. Generous enthusiasts raise plants for funds while other members grow old in the Sisyphean task of packeting for the seed exchange and others relentlessly (wo)man the screens almost 24 hours a day to keep our web active so as to include our distant members. Various folk cook, plant, write and paint while others organize all this effort into a coherent, impressive and, above all, welcoming club.

### **A Request for Help**

Constitutionally, the club is run as a charity to educate people about rock and alpine plants. This vital job is done by your council of two dozen members from Scotland and the North of England who meet amiably a few times a year to ensure all runs smoothly. Can you help do this? We need new council members to breathe life into our deliberations, to inspire us with their own passions, and to give skills to help keep the club healthy, wealthy and wise. Do not fall prey to false modesty - we *need* you! If interested, please contact our secretary, herself one of those who keep us all so well together, at [srgc.sec@googlemail.com](mailto:srgc.sec@googlemail.com). We welcome, need and will value your help.

### **A Bequest for Colour**

The commitment of some generous members stretches even beyond the grave. Wilbur R Danner, a recently deceased Canadian member, left us 20,000 Canadian dollars to improve the colour photographs in the journal. At the time of his bequest, colour was expensive and difficult. Now, we are accustomed to colourful and accurately rendered photographs on almost every page. Your council has therefore decided to apply these funds to the support of full page illustrations that might otherwise not appear, so as to help fulfil the charitable aims of the club by revealing to all readers the beauty of the plants.

### **In Quest of Beauty**

The quest for beauty turns our attention to those who show. I was inspired in the 1980s by a wonderful Edinburgh show, appreciating for the first time the penetrating beauty of alpine plants even when planted and reared far away from their natural habitats. Although no grower myself, I believe that those who grow and show are at the heart of our activities and our club. They are often modest folk whose real or only reward lies in the beauty that they nurture. They deserve recognition so, for the first time in many years, the show reports come first! Here they are ... but with so many reports to fit in one issue, I have removed the usual thanks; nevertheless I assure all readers that each show reporter was both fulsome and appreciative in their praise of the help given by showers, helpers, nurseries and organizers alike.

*The Editor* (who particularly thanks Peter Maguire, Liz Cole and others for the photographs in the show reports)

*Shows*



## Tulips at SRGC & Scottish Shows

Our shows usually have specific tulip classes (species and cultivated) though many of the open classes for bulbous plants may be entered.

The early bulb show at Dunblane occasionally has a few desirable tulips amongst the mass of snowdrops, winter aconites, narcissi, reticulated irises and crocuses. This year, because of the drawn-out winter, there were none. However, Margaret Thorne entertained over 250 visitors with an illustrated lecture on her 2012 exploration of eastern Turkey and showed a number of splendid habitat and close-up photographs, including *Tulipa julia* in both scarlet and yellow forms and the stoloniferous *T. sintenisii*, which appears to be a form of *T. armena* found in cultivated margins. A picture of both *Tulipa sintenisii* and *T. armena* suggested that the only discernible morphological difference was size, which could be attributed to the higher level of nutrients in cultivated ground. The weather had not improved by March and only two specimens of *T. polychroma* and the generally early-flowering *T. turkestanica* were exhibited at the Kincardine show; neither - sadly - showed well.

The Spring show of the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society, held over 23rd & 24th March at the RBGE, fared better with 24 entries across five classes, albeit 11 were within one class. A number of blooms with seven and eight petals had been awarded prizes over more correct forms, which was especially disappointing. Prominent amongst the species was the yellow *T. neustruevae* and in other classes the double, white *T. 'Mondial'* and the *kaufmanniana* varieties 'Show Winner' (carmine-red) and 'Shakespeare' (red with yellow ground) featured heavily.

In early April a different ensemble gathered at our Edinburgh show, largest of the Scottish alpine shows and drawing exhibitors and visitors from as far south as Lancashire and South Yorkshire. Tulips featured in three classes but the outstanding plant was *T. sogdiana*. It had whitish flowers with characteristic yellow centres, inner tepals being ovate and outer tepals narrower and acuminate with the red hue of an horizon-setting sun on their backs and a clearly defined stripe along the external mid rib. Many consider *T. sogdiana* to be simply a form of the *T. biflorus* complex. Whatever its classification, it is an admirable plant and when presented as a single specimen could truly be appreciated, eschewing the notion that prevails in so many shows that big and bountiful are necessarily better.

In mid April, exhibitors, like Border Reivers of yore, pitched camp in Hexham and battle commenced between Scottish, English and even Welsh growers. As the weather improved, the incidence of tulips at shows increased. A number of exhibits named as *T. kurdica* were present but with much variation. Some were of a terra-cotta hue whereas others appeared identical to *T. humilis* 'Lilliput', being slightly pinker, or like *T. humilis* 'Violacea' shown with magenta tepals. The difficulty in distinguishing *T. kurdica* and consideration of whether it is merely a form of *T. humilis* are well covered by Richard Wilford's

2006 book. It was interesting to note two specimens within the same class named as *T. kurdica* and *T. 'Lilliput'* where the only discernible difference was that 'Lilliput' had slightly more ovate tepals.

Later in April the caravan moved on to Perth where *T. humilis* and *T. urumiensis* specimens predominated. Inspection of the outer tepals of the many *urumiensis* specimens revealed considerable variation in the number of striations, with some having none, others faint lines and one with three prominent lines lateral to the mid-rib. Some were also probably the glassy-yellow clone 'Tity's Star'. A small clump of *T. humilis* 'Tête-à-Tête' drew disapproving glances from alpine purists but was much admired by the general public. It is a multi-headed double clone that looks like a small, congested, close-formed red peony.

The final SRGC show in Glasgow in early May had at least 14 classes for which tulips were eligible. The subtle charm of *T. cretica* and the strident red of *T. schrenkii* failed to arouse the judges whose interest had been captured by pans brimming with more standard fare such as the gaudy *T. clusiana* 'Cynthia', the buckets and spades appeal of *T. clusiana* 'Peppermint Stick' and the claims of the ubiquitous *T. humilis* 'Lilliput'.

In summary, not the best of years for tulips but still with one or two exceptional specimens, and the charming *T. sogdiana* perhaps being the best, especially as it had been purchased as a small bulb nearly 20 years ago and had been kept going through off-sets.

Frazer Henderson

*Tulipa schrenkii* at Perth





## Blackpool, 16th March

This show is usually synonymous with dionysias, saxifrages and, in some years, primulas. Not in chilly 2013! There were as many snowdrops in the show as dionysias; a real treat for the galanthophiles. *Galanthus elwesii* 'Penelope Ann' was new to me. It had superb large flowers with a single green mark shaped like a molar tooth, roots and all.

Part of the joy of travelling to shows is the anticipation of meeting old friends. Until the Blackpool and Northumberland shows started there were none in the North of England, and now for our Lancashire members this is their local show. The shows have proven enormously popular with both SRGC and AGC as the venues are reachable from central Scotland as well as northern and central England. This was the 25th show for its secretary, Lionel Clarkson, and our congratulations and thanks go to him for a quarter century of effort. The Kirby cup commemorates Lionel's predecessor, Wilf Kirby, and is awarded to the best foliage plant in the show. Frank & Barbara Hoyle won it with their flawless ten inch pan of *Helichrysum pagophilum*.

Geoff Rollinson has grown and shown his fabulous pan of *Fritillaria alburyana* for a long time. To simulate the cold conditions of mountainous western Turkey, Geoff keeps his pan in the fridge until growth starts. I can verify how reluctant it is to multiply by itself. I was given a single bulb over 20 years ago by Harold Esslemont and I have been scared of breaking it in two, as Paul Christian shows in his lectures, the secret to increasing the number of bulbs. I think Geoff has more courage than I.

*Sandy Leven*

## Stirling (Kincardine), 23rd March

Snowdrops that were in good condition at the Dunblane Early Bulb Display a month before were still fresh enough to come to Kincardine. For many other growers, especially those in the North-East and South-West of Scotland, their gardens and plants had disappeared under feet of windblown snow. Plants covered by snow drifts were protected from the effects of the endless damaging and desiccating north-easterly winds. Early flowering unprotected rhododendrons must have been frosted almost everywhere and only one pan appeared at Kincardine.



The difficult weather conditions meant we saw plants that do not usually appear at Stirling, which was a good thing for regular showers. It is a long time since so many crocuses were shown here; they normally go to the Early Bulb Display. We still had *Iris reticulata*, and Sam Sutherland's wonderful *Iris reichenbachii* was as good as at Blackpool. Once mature the plant often has two flowering stalks per stem, prolonging its flowering season. In nature, this increases the chance of setting seed in inclement weather. Scillas too were more plentiful, giving a fine swathe of blue. Of note was a pan of *Scilla winogradowii* entered by Margaret & Henry Taylor in the 'Grown from Seed' class. Their seed was collected in Turkey under the number AHEP 8371. Sown in 1985 as '*Scilla rosenii*', it proved to be *S. winogradowii*, both species growing together in the wild.

Saxifrages in troughs and under glass come to their best at the end of March but may be trampled and pecked at by birds, especially pigeons. Saxifrage buds must be tasty! There are hundreds of saxifrages to choose from. Tom Green proved the master at Stirling with his *Saxifraga* 'Redpoll' and *S.* 'Winifred', of a similar shade of pinkish-red. Over many years Ray Fairburn from Allandale has done much hybridizing, producing many excellent hybrids. Raised high in the Northumbrian hills, they usually do well in Scotland. Higher still, Neil Huntly of Hartside Nursery is propagating several and we hope many of us will get a good collection of these fine cushions.

Cyril Lafong's *Pulsatilla* aff. *vulgaris* and *Trillium rivale* 'Purple Heart' were as perfect as ever, continuing to enlarge. The pulsatilla won the Forrest medal for best in show and the Institute of Quarrying quaiach for best non-European plant. The trillium retained its title and the Ben Ledi plants trophy for best European plant in show. Cyril has often used these gems within his class 1 entry. It reminded us that some plants flower at the same time every year whereas others don't.

*Narcissus* 'Betty Mae'



Facing: *Corydalis* 'Frodo' 

An excellent entry of narcissi offered enough to interest a daffodil specialist. Jean Wyllie's *Narcissus* 'Betty Mae' topped the bill and received a certificate of merit. We have watched it from single bulb to large pan. Raised in New Zealand, the plant is still very restricted in UK gardens. I hope it gets into general circulation soon because its perfect tiny 'King Alfred' shaped flowers are among the smallest of all hybrids.

*Corydalis* in pots don't care about the weather but are difficult to show, because they tend to elongate under glass with weak and floppy stems. The trick is to keep stems short and stocky. Jim & Janet Paterson, Fumariaceae champions for several years, have the knack as demonstrated by their great pans-full. They included several of Janis Ruksans' 'Lord of the Rings' series, including *C.* 'Mordorland', *C.* 'Frodo' & *C.* 'Lothlorien' along with *Corydalis incisa* var. *alba*, *C.* 'Dieter Schacht' & *C.* 'Strawberries and Cream' while John Lee won the class for one pan Fumariaceae with a huge pan of *Corydalis solida* 'George Baker'. Ian & Carole Bainbridge's *Corydalis popovii* had been at Blackpool the previous week but was still in great condition. Sandy Leven showed *C. Solida* 'White Knight', but very eye-catching and most impressive were two of Jim & Janet's hybrid seedlings from *C. solida* 'Lahovice'. One was un-named but the other has the regal name of 'Glamis Pink'.

One of the strengths of the schedule for this show is that there are three 6 pan classes in entries in section 1 (6 small pans, 6 plants of different bulbous genera or 6 different bulbous) that provide much interest and colour. Is there room for new classes of 6 pans non-bulbous plants distinct and 6 pans non-bulbous plants of different genera? This would relax the schedule and encourage more entries from those specializing in particular groups such as *Primula*, *Saxifraga*, ferns, conifers, shrubs, *Crassulaceae* and foliage plants. Show schedules should reflect members' interests rather than force exhibits into strait-jacketed classes. Change is often for the better and if new classes can be introduced without losing the old ones then everyone wins.

Sue Simpson showed a superb *Pulsatilla* 'Budapest Seedling' in section 2. It reminded me in shade and size of the fabulous plant that won a Forrest medal for Fred Hunt at the Stirling show in 1994. Beautifully presented, Sue's plant filled a 12 inch pan. *Pulsatillas* have long roots and need great care over winter when grown in pots. Watering must be controlled to prevent rotting off or the other extreme of bud failure through too little water. *P.* 'Budapest' is a legendary plant. Fred's came from a rooted cutting raised and grown by the late Molly Sanderson in her Irish garden. All plants named *Pulsatilla* 'Budapest' should have been propagated from cuttings of the original, owned by Valerie Finnis. The strain 'Budapest Blue' was propagated by seed from both Jack Drake's and Joe Elliott's nurseries. The name and legendary status of 'Budapest' provoked Mike Stone to write an article in an earlier SRGC journal. He called the plant 'the non-existent Holy Grail of pulsatillas'. Read it and wonder. It's not







quite 'The Da Vinci Code' but the mystery encompasses many famous names from rock gardening's history.

I raised several 'seedlings of Budapest' from seed given by the late Isa Hall and none was of a shade anything like the real thing. Isa told me that, because 'Budapest' flowered earlier than other *pulsatillas*, if you harvested and sowed the early-set seed from the first pollinated flowers, you would get self-pollinated seed that would be 90% true. Has Sue perhaps succeeded with this method?

*Sandy Leven*

### Edinburgh, 6th April

"First time in living memory" responded joint show secretary Ian Bainbridge to an inquiry about the incidence of snowdrops on the Edinburgh show benches. Ian's reply provided confirmation, were any needed, of one of the longest winters on record. However, despite the Scottish weather we enjoyed a fine show with a wide range of plants, as many growers from England had travelled north to delight us with their offerings. Appropriately, David Boyd brought a bevy - if that be the collective noun, sounding a little more distinguished than 'a cirrhosis' - of hepaticas from Northumbria. Appropriately? Well, yes, since hepatica is known in Japan as 'Yukiwariso' or The Snow-breaking Plant; the Japanese have invested in it the attention, or even reverence, that the British attach to snowdrops. Hepaticas, however, come in a wider range of shades of blue, lavender, pink and, of course, white, each with a contrasting colour of stamens. The liver-shaped leaves give hepatica its unattractive name although it is the very morphology of its leaves that caused the plant to be harvested for its supposed medicinal properties in treating liver ailments. We now know, of course, that there is no medical link between the liver-shape and any cure or arresting of liver ailments.

David won class 1 with a fine entry that included *Hepatica insularis* (white and pink forms), *H. nobilis* var. *asiatica* with a wondrously blue sheen, and three japonica varieties of *nobilis* - 'Shikouden' (double bi-coloured deep blue and white), 'Shirayuki' (double white) and 'Akone' (cerise petals with green ovaries and white stamens). David also won class 5, which tests a grower's skill raising and selecting plants, with a superb selection of *H. nobilis* that demonstrated variation within a single colour with a thunderously dark blue, an overcast cumulo-blue and a sunny sky-blue. In class 77, showcasing ability to produce notable hybrids, David had a deep, velveteen-blue *Hepatica* x *schlyteri* together with its cross-continental parents *H. nobilis* and *H. maxima*. As many gardeners will know, *H. nobilis* is a European species most often found in deciduous woodland whereas his *H. maxima* selection had come from the Korean island of Ulleungdo. David noted helpfully that foliage of *H. maxima*, which can grow to a hand's width, often hides the flowers so that the species is perhaps not ideal for showing despite making a good parent. Another

interesting fact is that hybrids with Asian parents may take two to three years to germinate whereas those of European or American parentage are much more precocious and usually germinate in their first year. However, in all cases it is a prerequisite that hepatica seed should be sown when fresh.

In view of the number and quality of hepaticas it was unsurprising that David won the Forrest medal for a splendid pot of *Hepatica transsilvanica* 'Blue Jewel', sparkling in the weak morning sunshine and entrancing everyone with its beguiling riches. Other plants provided a degree of competition, such as *Tecophilaea cyanocrocus* (Cyril Lafong), *Townsendia hookeri* (Tom Green), *Trillium ovatum* f. *hibbersonii* (David Millward), *Corydalis solida* 'George Baker' (Peter Semple) and *Pulsatilla vernalis* (Cyril Lafong). Their entrancements were less although each deservedly received a certificate of merit.

The Edinburgh show always has a fine showing of narcissi and this was doubly so this year as the number of classes for this genus was increased by separating species & natural hybrids from garden-raised cultivars. This change allowed entries to compete against like types. In the species & natural hybrid classes David & Stella Rankin showed a splendid *Narcissus jacetanus* which, unlike its close relative *N. asturiensis*, prefers limestone. This plant had graced the benches at the earlier Blackpool show and must have been in suspended animation, for it was still perfect to enjoy at Edinburgh. Fittingly, it was awarded the 80th Anniversary prize for best narcissus. Other notable species were the simply-formed *N. rupicola* as well as *N. watieri* with its ice-white tepals and adpressed corolla. The hybrid *N. provincialis* x *alpestris* had its supporters. This

*Hepatica insularis*



bulb had grown steadily since being seed-sown in 2006 but had taken seven years to flower. It was worth the wait for the deep yellow of the tepals inherited from the female seed parent and for its nodding shape that derives from *N. alpestris*. Apparently, it survives in a very gritty compost, although under cover in the alpine house.

In the eyes of some, cultivated forms of narcissi are merely *nouveau riche*, and an embarrassment to their noble forebears. Nevertheless, a full pan of *Narcissus* 'Betty Mae' with its corolla seemingly topiarized with pinking shears certainly had its supporters, as did NN. 'Bowles Early Sulphur', 'Pledge' and 'Colleen Bawn' (named after the popular Victorian play by the Irish playwright Dion Boucicault).

Tulips had been affected by the long winter, with few coming into bud. Of those shown, Cathy & Barry Caudwell's small pot of *Tulipa sogdiana*, as described earlier, was the most appealing.

The Edinburgh show is rightly noted for its exuberance of primulas. Ger van den Beuken, our visiting judge, was fulsome in his praise, "The primulas are magnificent. The air humidity in Britain helps - we just can't keep them going in the Netherlands - but to grow plants well also requires a lot of skill and attention. When judging I always have in mind the difficulty in keeping these plants in character and this is best shown by the outstanding *Primula sonchifolia*." This plant, from the open mountain meadows of Yunnan and Szechuan, won for Stella & David Rankin the R E Cooper Bhutan drinking cup for the best Asiatic primula.

*Hepatica x schlyteri*

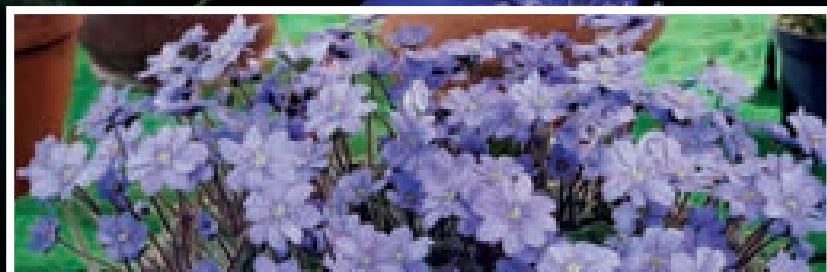


The focus of the show naturally falls on section 1, in which seasoned growers and showers reside, but there were splendid plants in section 2 from local members and those new to showing. Pamela Anderson's winning six pans, for instance, of saxifrages, primulas, *Corydalis solida* and *Draba bruniifolia* in class 80 would have been highly competitive even in section 1. Local members Jeanne & Ewan Mason walked off - for the third year running - with the best plant in section 2 for a splendid *Pulsatilla vulgaris*.

Many miniature gardens demonstrated aesthetic as well as horticultural skills. Very attractive to the public, they ranged from moraines or rock outcrops simulating nature to densely planted creations, each manifesting the grower's own interest and artistic preferences. In a strong field of seven, Watt Russell won the Boonslie cup for the best, with his collection of saxifrages interspersed with drabas and primulas surmounted on a block of weathered tufa.

The RBGE graced the show with a beautifully symmetric display. Fritillaria species were to the fore with splendid examples of the stately *F. imperialis*.

Facing: *Narcissus provincialis* x *alpestris* & *Tulipa Sogdiana*  
*Hepatica* 'Blue Jewel'









*Fritillaria raddeana*

One much admired specimen (an Iranian collection) had arresting very deep crimson flowers contrasting to the more often seen fox-red colour, while another possessed more subdued flowers of lime-green (*Fritillaria chitralensis*).

Watt Russell's mini-garden



Smaller and more delicate than *F. imperialis* was a white *F. raddeana*, again from north-east Iran. Other species included two beautifully balanced green-purplish *F. sewerzowii*, a white *F. bucharica* and a fresh, bright, daffodil-yellow *F. pudica*.

This splendid display captured much interest with its individual plants from across the world each meriting close attention. One can only admire the horticultural skills of the 'Botanics' gardeners and thank them for sharing their knowledge and extensive plant collection.

*Frazer Henderson*

### Hexham, 13th April

After the long and cold early spring, a few warm days before the Northumberland show helped produce a fabulous floral spectacle at Hexham. This must rank as one of the best shows for many a while. The benches bulged

*Cyclamen persicum*




with 814 plants from 88 exhibitors. A breadth of high quality entries tested the judges' skill. There were, for example, 7 entries in the large 3 pans Primulaceae (class 4), 16 entries in the small 3 pan rock plants (class 51), 18 entries in the small 1 pan Fumariaceae (class 67), and 7 entries in the small 3 pan rock plants in section 2 (class 129).

The quality was recognized by the judges in the award of a number of certificates of merit: to Frank & Barbara Hoyle (Chipping) for *Townsendia spathulata* 'Cotton Balls'; to Don Peace (Yarm) for a very neat *Fritillaria aurea* x *pinardii*, a hybrid that was new to me. This hybrid seems to contain the best elements of both superb parents. A further award was made for *Primula sherriffiae* from the gold award display by the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh. Few currently grow this delightful species and it was a rare pleasure to behold. Steve Walters (Shelley) competed for the first time and was awarded a certificate of merit for his outstanding *Cyclamen persicum* in class 162 (section 3); a pale form of the species gained him the Northumberland cup in class 168 for exhibitors who had not previously won a first prize at AGS or SRGC national shows. His high quality entries throughout earned him the Cyril Barnes trophy for most first prize points in a very competitive section 3. Well done Steve - we do hope to see you at future shows!

Tony Taziker (Thornton) won the Gordon Harrison cup for most first prize points in the latter, also gaining a bronze medal. David Boyd was awarded the R B Cooke plate in section 1 for a massive haul of 48 firsts. His class 1 six pan entry and AGS medal typified for me the final arrival of spring; the entry contained 3 Irises, *Il. reticulata*, *winogradowii*, and 'Sheila Ann Germaney', with three hepaticas, including the Forrest medal plant from the previous week in Edinburgh. Ian Kidman (Ebchester) was awarded the AGS medal for the small six-pan class 50.

There was much to enjoy but I came away with some personal favourites. I mention the enormous cushion of *Saxifraga* 'Coolock Gem' exhibited by Mark Childerhouse (Brigg) - just for its sheer size as well as quality. Tim Lever's (Aberconwy) entry in class 81, 3 pans from any one genus, with 3 very well grown cushions of *Androsace* was interesting. The plants included *A. yargongensis* from the Himalaya, *A. ciliata* from the Pyrenees and finally *A. aff. lehmanniana*. The last species is widespread across Asia and North America and is usually yellow but here it was a very pale yellowish cream with a deeper yellow eye. In its native habitat, *Anemone caucasica* is a snow-melt plant and hence can get quite leggy, but here George Young (Stocksfield) had ensured that the flowers were just above the topping, showing it at its best. Ian Christie's (Kirriemuir) *Erythronium hendersonii* 'Ardovie Bliss', with its dark eye and palest

Facing: *Primula sherriffiae*, often *P. sherriffiae* and sometimes *P. sherriffii*, has been the subject of much correspondence in 2013. According to the researchers at the International Plant Names Index, the plant is properly *Primula sherriffiae*, named in 1936 after Mrs Sherriff 



pink flush to the perianth segments, is a fabulous plant to look forward to seeing again. The most popular plant was perhaps *Primula* 'Broadwell Milkmaid' as highlighted by Sandy Leven in his website report, but for me the most striking primula was *Primula* 'Mars' with deep purple flowers and white star-like centres.

The lone Hecker trophy for the best Primulaceae went not to one of the many outstanding primulas but to a perfectly covered 15 cm diameter cushion of *Douglasia laevigata* exhibited by Frank & Barbara Hoyle; they also had an almost equally wonderful *Douglasia montana* in class 4. The E G Watson trophy for 1 pan new or rare in cultivation (class 102) went to Keith & Rachel Lever (Aberconwy) for *Viola alpina*. This was, unusually for Hexham, one of four distinct violas on show: the others were *V. beckwithii* var. *beckwithii*, *trinervata* and *brevistipulata* var. *hidakana*. The Sandhoe trophy for the best pan not exceeding 19 cm went to Les Brown (Southport) for his lovely Turkish *Scilla melaina*. I have seen this in its natural habitat in south-west Turkey but this was the first time I'd seen it on the bench.

With such an array of plants, who and what won the coveted Farrer medal? It was awarded to Cyril Lafong (Glenrothes) for an outstanding *Tecophilaea cyanocrocus*. This magnificent cluster of the Chilean corms was from his large three pan entry in class 2, accompanied by *Dionysia aretioides* 'Compact Form' and *Pulsatilla vernalis*. The last may be progeny from Cyril's wondrous plant that won him so many awards a few years ago. Is this an omen for the future ... ?

*David Millward*

*Pulsatilla vernalis*





## Perth, 20th April

2013 was unusually a very late season but wouldn't it be boring if the same plants turned up at the same shows each year? Perth benefited from many entries in the Narcissus classes as well as some good big pans of the *Primula allionii* hybrids. In general the early spring bulbs and alpines were still out and primulas remained in particularly fine condition. Susan Band (Pitcairngreen) brought a wonderful large trough of white primula hybrids. There were also some very fine miniature gardens. Many people enjoy creating these in large pans or small polystyrene troughs. The miniature gardens seem to be widely popular at the moment - why not have a go yourself next year?

This year's Forrest medal was awarded to Carole & Ian Bainbridge (Edinburgh) for their spectacular *Saxifraga andersonii*, covered with pink flowers. This plant was grown from seed collected by Ron McBeath in 1983 in the Mersgendi Valley in the Himalayas. It germinated within twelve months and all Carole & Ian then had to do was to keep it growing for the next thirty years! This saxifrage can be white or pink in colour - it is very variable in wild populations. Moist conditions are essential for success. The saxifrage was a winner of class 2 along with *Narcissus rupicola watieri* 'Aberleish' and *Arum creticum*. Ian & Carole also won the bulb trophy with their *Narcissus rupicola watieri* and the Dundas quach for class 2.

Stan da Prato (Edinburgh) could probably have covered the benches on his own! He was awarded the L C Middleton challenge trophy for the most points in section 1. Stan has been stalwart in supporting recent shows,

*Primula allionii*



particularly with dwarf rhododendrons. His *Rhododendron* 'Lucy Lou' was the best on the bench and also won the E H M Cox trophy.

In class A, Cyril Lafong's (Glenrothes) 6 pan consisted of drabas, primulas and androsaces. Draba is not always popular as a genus, but *Draba* 'Buttermilk' (*Draba longisiliqua* x *Draba ossetica*) is a gem. He also had a lovely cream *Androsace lehmanniana*. Cyril won the Alexander Caird trophy and the Joyce Halley award for the best plant grown from seed for his *Pulsatilla aurea*. This pulsatilla is not often seen at shows but is found on ridges around 2300 m in the Caucasus (see Michael Almond's article in The Rock Garden, June 2001).

As usual, Margaret & Henry Taylor (Invergowrie) had some lovely and unusual plants on the bench and were awarded the Perth trophy for the most points in show. In the plants raised from seed (class 5) Margaret & Henry had *Primula maximowiczii* raised from their own seed sown in 2009. It was grown on in rich gritty compost in a shaded frame. Graeme Butler from Rumbling Bridge exhibited a *Primula cachemiriana* that took the R S Masterton memorial trophy for the best Asiatic primula.

Our thanks go to John Mitchell, Elspeth MacKintosh and the staff of the RBGE for their exceptional displays of plants which we would otherwise not get the chance to see. This year the judges selected one plant from the Botanic

Saxifrages from Mark Childerhouse



Garden's display for a professional Forrest medal, a spectacular *Erythronium multiscapideum*.

The few plants in section 2 were really good; Sue Simpson (Ayrshire) was awarded the bronze medal and the Perth salver for the most points. Congratulations to her - it's marvellous to have new entrants like Sue. We hope that other members who have never exhibited before will be inspired to show some of their plants in 2014!

*Cathy Caudwell*

### Highland, 27th April

Entries were up on last year. Despite the weather, as the benches began to fill it became increasingly clear that there were many lovely plants around. When the hall closed for judging, the benches looked every bit as spectacular as the previous year. Only a few classes were uncontested and many had five or more entries. In addition, as we are coming to expect at the Highland Show, section 2 was especially well populated, with many plants being worthy of entry in section 1. The novel inclusion of a few classes in section 5 so as to encourage participation of local non-club members was a successful experiment that we hope to continue. Support and entries came from right across Scotland from

*Erythronium x hendersonii* 'Ardovie Bliss'



Caithness to Edinburgh and Glasgow. Yet again, feedback from all concerned was positive and confirmed how much the show was enjoyed.

Carole & Ian Bainbridge displayed some beautiful plants widely this year and wowed us in Nairn as well, taking the Forrest medal with a near-faultless pan of *Narcissus rupicola* ssp. *watieri* 'Abaleish' with over 60 pure-white flowers. Nor was there another bulb exhibit to compare; it landed them the heavy lump of rock known as the Askival trophy for the best bulb entry.

Stan da Prato is a godsend for show secretaries, putting large numbers of quality plants on the benches, ensuring a good display for visitors and serious competition for other exhibitors! Packing so many plants into an ordinary car has become an art, attracting accusations that it is really a Tardis! His efforts were worthwhile for, yet again, he carried off the Highland trophy for most points in section 1. His six pan entry (class 1) comprised three primulas, two drabas and a soldanella; it was perhaps my favourite and it received much deserved attention from all other visitors.

I have a thing (simple things...) for cushion plants and there were plenty to excite me. Amongst them were Stan's *Raoulia* x *petrimia* 'Margaret Pringle' and *Androsace vandellii* (not the biggest plant I have seen but definitely the most floriferous, earning a certificate of merit), Nick Boss's *Saxifraga cebennensis* (class 20), the Bainbridges' *Saxifraga andersonii*, covered in pink flowers, and *Helichrysum pagophilum* (class 76) that won Olive Bryers the Dunbarney salver for the best plant in section 2.

The Highland RGC sponsored the prize for the best plant from a first time exhibitor and donated a nursery voucher for the winner of class 71 (2 pans rock plants, distinct in section 2), this latter celebrating this year's eightieth anniversary of the SRGC. Wondering if anyone would emerge to receive the former award, the organizers were delighted when, a few days before the show, Francis & Margaret Higgins from Caithness sent us a whole list of entries. They showed a lovely selection of good plants, taking the former prize and a certificate of merit with *Celmisia ramulosa* and the latter with *Primula* 'Beatrice Wooster' and *Calceolaria uniflora* var. *darwinii*. One plant of particular interest was their plant of *Primula auricula* 'Black Jack' that won class 81. It was bred by Graeme Butler of Rumbling Bridge Nursery and he praised it very highly, saying it was the best specimen he had ever seen! Francis & Margaret also took the Weir shield for the best plant exhibited by a member of the Highland and Moray RGC with their *Soldanella minima* in class 2. I and many others certainly hope we will see them and their plants again next year; they definitely made a significant contribution to the show.

Coline Souter of the Moray RGC won the George Roslyn-Shirras trophy for most points in section 2. She showed a good variety of plants, including a winning entry in class 70 with six pans of primulas. Quite an achievement for someone who only entered her first show last year!

John Owen

Facing: *Viola beckwithii* 🇬🇧





IRIS AFGHANICA. (IRIDACEAE)

AFGHANISTAN.

Although it has been in cultivation for many years it has always been rare with only a very few growers keeping it going. Also some of the very few plants are infected with virus. This plant has remained clean and vigorous even in a gritty compost in full light.

## Glasgow, 4th May

“Cometh the hour, cometh the plants” is not merely the plaintive mantra of this show secretary but a working principle that staves off any tendency to stumble into Desperation Row as show day advances ever closer. As it is, a fortuitous gap in the calendar of our sister organization the AGS has, for the last couple of years, resulted in many North of England members driving up to the Dear Green Place, their cars loaded with magnificent plants. This year the resulting benches had to be extended several times to accommodate the floral abundance. An extra judging team was press-ganged in mid-meringue to sort out more than 500 pans: a logistical bounty devoutly to be wished. Bear in mind, too, that many regular exhibitors were attending the alternative delights of the Prague conference, and you might forgive me for thinking (complacency held well in check) that the show’s immediate future looks reasonably healthy!

What is indisputably healthy is the cross-border cooperation and dual involvement that, while mutually advantageous, have such an air of relaxed spontaneity about them ... we could easily have been in Blackpool or Hexham, different plants notwithstanding. Witness Ian Kidman (Ebchester), reliable supporter of our show and proselytizer of the genus *Dionysia*, who took the Forrest medal with his other great love, an *Androsace hirtella* x *cylindrica*, a stunning white cushion aristocrat. With two other white plants in his 3 pan entry - taking the Henry Archibald rose bowl - it was perhaps inevitable that his *Ranunculus alpestris* was overlooked by the judges. Easily the best *Ranunculus* I’ve seen in recent years! For good measure Ian also took the Dr William Buchanan memorial rose bowl for large 6 pans, the Diamond Jubilee prize for small 6 pans (amazingly, 7 entries here) and the Crawford silver challenge cup for most first prize points. In his vast array of entries were the usual Primulaceae suspects like *Androsace*, *Dionysia* and *Primula* but also strapping specimens from genera such as *Cyclamen*, *Vitaliana*, *Narcissus*, *Viola*, *Draba* and *Saxifraga*. Plenty to celebrate there!

Ian’s fellow traveller, George Young from Stocksfield, unfailingly brings to Glasgow an exercise in eclectic bravura that finds its true home in class 3 (3 pans new, rare or difficult). On this occasion he had *Androsace* aff. *elatior*, *Myosotis glabrescens* and *Townsendia spathulata* ‘Cotton Ball’. The last, aptly named, Rocky Mountains treasure is a selection or introduction from nurseryman Graham Nicholls - a silvery green and downy cushion studded with sessile daisies for pretty much alpine perfection. This trio gained George the William C Buchanan challenge cup and was joined in the winners’ enclosure by his *Primula albenensis*. This blue-flowered gem with a white centre succinctly combines auricula-type foliage with petiolarid delicacy and delighted the judges to the tune of two prizes, the Joan Stead for best primula and the 75th Anniversary award for best plant in a small pan.

Tranent hosts Stan da Prato and also boasts another of our foremost exhibitors, Watt Russell, whose contributions similarly need to be recognized.



Watt's *Paris quadrifolia*, that epitome of unassuming woodland simplicity, stood (if you'll forgive the paradox) head and shoulders above all the other Scottish natives and took for the second year running the coveted Ian Donald memorial trophy, fittingly presented to Watt by Ian's wife, Helen. At the other end of the spectrum of visual impact reside the orchids, and while there were plenty of pleione on parade to delight us all, it was Watt's full-in-your-face *Calanthe tricarinata* that captured the judges' fancy and the redoubtable Charles M Simpson Memorial trophy for best orchid.

Local lad, John di Paola, can always be relied upon to bench many plants of discriminating excellence and on this occasion he won the Edward Darling trophy with three sumptuous rhododendrons: purple-violet 'Ramapo', yellow 'Princess Anne' and pale yellow-green 'Shamrock'. The winner of the Don Stead prize for most bulbous points was Dai Davies (Killearn) whose standout plant was a well filled pan of *Fritillaria affinis* 'Vancouver Island', one of the darker selections of this very variable species. However, the best fritillary in the show was undoubtedly Peter Semple's *Fritillaria pallidiflora* which was in good fettle in its hernia-size pot. Although I would always place the species near the top rung of the fritillary ladder, its pale yellow and broad-shouldered stolidity never finds universal approbation - or am I damning it with faint praise? Pallid by name and so forth. Fear not, Peter, its day will come ...

The inveterate show goer will have conscientiously noted the name of Sue Simpson (Ayrshire) as she cut a swathe through the section 2 schedules at our various venues this year; Glasgow was no exception. She won the small 6 pan Jubilee prize, the James Wilson trophy for most points in section 2 and the bronze medal, but the quality and assurance of her plants hint at even loftier achievements to come. Here is a sample: *Anemonella thalictroides*, *Primula* 'White Lady', *Clematis x cartmanii* 'Joe', *Lewisia tweedyi rosea*, *Pleione* 'Tongariro', *Saxifraga* 'Ayer's Rock', *Townsendia formosa* ... this is an Ayrshire lass to be reckoned with.

Right next to section 2 was the gold medal display from the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh. Last year's break only intensified the impact of this year's lovingly constructed exhibit; most plants were recognizable favourites but there was a core of esoteric beauties providing a highly desirable wow factor ... not least the species of *Cyrtanthus*. It is testament to a professional eye that at each of our shows RBGE fashions an organic entity that both reflects the season with current material and projects rock garden potential without actually creating one - after all, it is only pots. Every exhibit is different and creates its own unique ambience. Thank you John and Elspeth, ably supported by Struan and the whole backroom team.

Facing: *Petrocosmea flaccida* 🇨🇦





My favourite plant? It has to be *Iris afghanica* shown by one of the country's great plantsmen, Brian Burrow (Lancaster). The Furses introduced this to cultivation in the mid-sixties during their legendary trips to the Middle-East and Central Asia and it is easily the finest of the Regelia section. The standards are pale yellow while the falls show brown-purple veining on a cream ground - truly a stunning combination. Two plants received certificates of merit: Sam Sutherland's (Kincardine) *Astragalus utahensis* and Lionel Clarkson's (Blackpool) *Androsace villosa* (Irik Gorge form).

*John Lee*

### Discussion Weekend, 5th October

As in previous years, the Discussion Weekend show was smaller than others, but this is not to impugn the quality of the plants brought for our pleasure. There was a very wide, excellent and exciting range. As an extension to the usual arrangements, we opened to the public on Saturday morning once judging was over, allowing local people to enjoy the plants on display and to support the nursery stands. As usual, cyclamen and gentians were particularly well represented but foliage plants and autumn colour also made a strong impression. Very few classes in section 1 lacked entries (always a relief for show secretaries) but, sadly, entries in section 2 were not so plentiful. With only a few exceptions, the quality of plants was high and some of them were indeed outstanding. This made many of the judges' decisions straightforward although various classes required more lengthy deliberation. Our judicial triumvirate (all strong characters from the ladies of the SRGC) was well up to the task and, overhearing many of their lively deliberations, was also highly amusing.

An indication of the overall quality of the plants was the award of four certificates of merit - to Carol & David Shaw for a lovely specimen of *Saxifraga longifolia* (possibly a hybrid, as it had several near-perfect rosettes), to Lionel Clarkson for a very large mound of *Androsace idahoensis* x *laevigata* and two to Stan da Prato for a well grown plant of *Pinus mugo* 'Mops Midget' and *Gentiana* 'Blue Silk'. Fred & Pat Bundy impressed us with their three beautiful pots of *Petrocosmea* in class 3, which deservedly won them the East Lothian trophy. Section 2, despite sparse entries, had some lovely plants on display. Christine Boulby took the East Lothian cup for the best plant in the section with her *Saxifraga fortunei* 'Fumiko'.

As is often the case, Stan da Prato excited visitors with his great variety of plants. The *Pinus mugo* mentioned above won him the J L Mowat trophy for the best conifer and his miniature garden took the Logan Home trophy. Getting 17 red stickers in section 1 ensured the writing (again) of his name on the Mary Bowe trophy for most points in section 1.

Facing: *Saxifraga fortunei* 'Fumiko'

Jean Wyllie did very well, accumulating ten red stickers - amongst her successful plants were her striking yellow *Stembergia lutea* (not her biggest pot - which had already finished flowering) and a range of *Crocus*, *Colchicum* and *Cyclamen*. Amongst them was the little known, lovely and scented *Cyclamen colchicum*. As well as their certificate of merit, Carol & David Shaw won the Wellstanlaw cup for their lovely arrangement of flowers and fruit.


The gentians are always striking on the show bench, if not always so in the garden whenever the weather gets to them before they open properly. Judging class 30 (3 pans of gentians) was one of the more difficult tasks for the judges, who eventually decided in favour of a trio from Roma Fiddes and awarded her the Peel trophy. Roma also took the Jim Lever memorial trophy for the best cyclamen with a fantastic big specimen of *Cyclamen mirabile*. Surprisingly, Roma declined my offer to rehome it as I saw it come out of her car. After perhaps the judges' longest deliberation, the plant overcame a number of other contenders to win the Forrest medal.

*John Owen*

### Newcastle, 12th October

Once again we were treated to a wonderful display of flowers, foliage and fruits at this year's show, which seems perfectly timed to catch the best of the autumn colour. Over the past few years, the show secretaries have introduced innovative classes to increase the amount of variety and this year brought in a class for autumn foliage from alpine plants using a base of the exhibitor's choosing. This produced some splendid entries and David Boyd was a worthy winner with a delicate exhibit containing, amongst other foliage, leaves of some of the many cyclamen he grows.

The main floral power of the autumn shows is inevitably found with cyclamen, gentians and, to a lesser extent, crocus; a splendid example of *Cyclamen graecum* ssp. *graecum* won a Forrest medal for Bob & Rannveig Wallis. Another, white, form of the same subspecies was in the running for top spot and won them a certificate of merit. Gentians were numerous, providing a strong splash of deep blue where their classes were to be found, but the best of them - and another certificate of merit winner for local group member Mala Janes - was a huge potful of a white form of *Gentiana sino-ornata* covered in flowers that were heavily spotted with blue to create a more subtle but stunning display.

We have seen impressive pots of nerines over the years at Newcastle and this year's *Nerine filifolia* earned Peter Farkasch a certificate of merit. Amongst other plants that caught my eye were Tim Lever's heavily berried *Gaultheria crassa* 'John Saxton' and a much-admired *Primula sherriffiae* in flower. Continuing the autumnal berried theme, a large and profusely berried Facing: *Gaultheria crassa* 'John Saxton' 









*Dodecatheon clevelandii*

*Coprosma petriei* from Angie & Trevor Jones won a certificate of merit (and a prominent place on the cover of this issue!)

To conclude my short report, I mention a wonderful embroidery display of alpine plants by Jean Morris. Jean has exhibited exquisite needlework at AGS shows for many years, and this year had combined entries produced over a considerable period to create a large, very informative and educational display of various styles of embroidery and other forms of needlework depicting alpine plants. She was rewarded by the judges for her creativity and long journey north with a very well-deserved gold medal.

*Peter Maguire*

Facing: *Myrteola nummularia* 🇨🇦  
*Cyclamen graecum* ssp. *graecum*



# Adventures in Sagarmatha National Park

Doug Logan



The summit of my desires as an enthusiastic plantsman is the hunting of my favourite plants in their natural environment. The feeling of finding a sought-after plant is a mixture of excitement, admiration and fulfilment. No wonder it's an extremely addictive and ultimately costly hobby. Many times have I been given sideways glances and a wide berth when celebrating the discovery of an unusual or desirable plant! The opportunity to claw my fingers through the earth around specimens so as to examine soil structure and to experience the climate and natural habitats has taught me the specific requirements for survival and cultivation of these plants.

In 2011, Clint Callens stayed with my family in Canterbury whilst exploring the Southern Alps for a taste of our alpine. Sharing a similar passion for plants, we instantly became mates and soon planned many botanical adventures to hunt down our most wanted. With species like *Arisaema*, *Meconopsis*, *Paris* and *Podophyllum* at the top of the list, Nepal was our first choice for its combination of forest and alpine zones. After many late nights of researching, planning and seeking advice, we decided to explore up to the Gokyo Lake district of the Sagarmatha National Park and set our dates for the Himalayan late spring. After getting

Facing: The Ngozumpa Glacier and Gokyo village (5357 m)  
Right: *Arisaema propinquum* makes a serpent-like statement in deep moist shade (2800 m)



out word of our plans we had two more takers: Robin Callens, Clint's younger brother and fellow *Arisaema* fanatic; and Rob Coulter, another New Zealand plantsman.

After the initial culture shock of being crammed in Kathmandu with 1.74 million human beings, we organized national park permits and documentation and went back to the airport to be squeezed into a tiny twin-engine plane. The flight to Lukla promised to be adventurous as the airport is rated the most dangerous on earth. As we approached the 700 metre mountain runway, violent turbulence really grated at my nerves but, with several deep breaths, eyes squeezed tightly shut and fingers clawed deep into the seat in front of me, we landed safely and stumbled out. Within half an hour we, three porters and our luggage were on our way to our first overnight stop at Phakding (2620 m). No more than 200 metres after leaving the village of Lukla, Clint was scrambling up the bank towards a stunning *Arisaema propinquum*, its purple-striped cobra inflorescence gleaming in the backlit sunlight. Only a few metres further on stood *Arisaema intermedium*, its long spadix extension drooping a metre down

Stunning colours of *Euphorbia wallichii* (3500 m)



the bank, offering an easy leg-up for any pollinating insects. All four of us were delirious with excitement by this stage; our porters looked on with confusion and amusement that we were so engrossed with these plants. Little did they know that by the end of this trip they were going to be transformed into plant hunters and to have a new respect for their country's flora.

The trail led us through many little villages and farms. Every square metre of flat land has been claimed, cultivated and divided up by remarkable dry-stone walls. The main crops were potatoes and wheat, but every house had its own little garden crammed with spinach, onions, other vegetables and herbs. Alongside the walls sheltered many stunning plants, most notably *Euphorbia wallichii*. Growing right up to 4000 metres, *E. wallichii* is a beautiful and resilient character. Specimens ranged from 30 to 100 cm with fluorescent lime-green to burnt-orange bracts. A plant I love in the garden - if only we could have this selection of variations to pick from the local nursery! Among these drifts of *Euphorbia* were clumps of other *Arisaema* species such as *A. tortuosum*, *A. erubescens* and *A. exappendiculatum*. We were finding it hard to keep moving while

*Arisaema exappendiculatum*,  
another shade dweller (2900 m)

*Arisaema tortuosum*, a magnificent  
statement for any garden (2600 m)



so many distractions led us from the path. Patches of thirty to forty *Arisaema erubescens* were a common sight, with stunning red and green snake-skinned stems and striped spathes. I was amazed to note the dry soil conditions these tubers can withstand. The trail wound up the valley through forests of *Pinus wallichiana* and *Pieris formosa*. Straying off the trail occasionally led us to discoveries of *Paris polyphylla*, *Polygonatum* and *Disporum* species.

Our porters warned me that the trail up to Namche Bazaar (3440 m) would test me; I am not the most athletically built lad and they were right! The continuous staircase seemed to stretch on into the heavens and with clouds looming we had to push on. *Androsace sarmentosa* dotted their way along the rocky banks in multiple shades of white, pink and pale blue. While glimpsing the township on the horizon we made our first

Facing Top: *Paris polyphylla*, ranging from 30 to 100 cm, dry shade (3000 m)

Facing Below: Our delicious discovery of a yellow *Thermopsis barbata* (3500 m)

Below: *Thermopsis barbata*, a new favourite alpine with outstanding qualities, Namche Bazaar (3440 m)







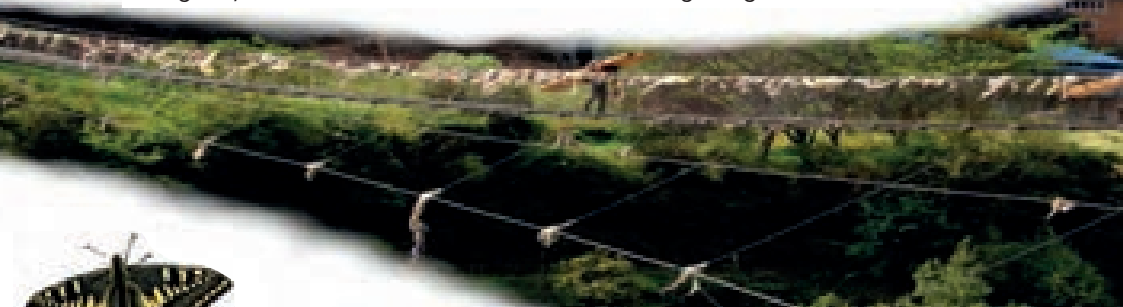
acquaintance with *Thermopsis barbata*. I had never before set eyes on this plant and it was love at first sight – a highlight of my journey. The combination of hairy blue-grey foliage and large, deep red to black pea flowers captivated us all and had us lining up for photo opportunities. Little did we know there were acres of blooming plants to come later, above Namche.

During the following acclimatization day we came across a huge patch of *Thermopsis*, where I discovered two small specimens with yellow flowers. I am interested to find out whether these are an oddity or another species, *Thermopsis smithiana*. Because of its location and surrounding plants we believe it a yellow form of *T. barbata*. Digging down beside a plant we inspected the huge fleshy tap root of *T. barbata* - no wonder this beauty can survive the coldest, driest and harshest of environments.

Swing bridges are common in New Zealand's national parks, usually with a warning sign at each end insisting on one person at a time. Nepal takes this bridge engineering to the limit: by the end of our trip we thought nothing of hanging over the edge of a fifty metre one-lane swing bridge, avoiding the horns of fifteen buffalo or yaks travelling in the other direction. If not buffalo, it may be twenty donkeys and a team of Sherpas carrying hundred kilogram loads of timber.

Namche Bazaar is an amazing place, with beautiful hand-built stone architecture forming a huge amphitheatre. It is the biggest township of the Sagarmatha National Park and an important acclimatization stop for travellers. It is also the best place to indulge in pizza and buffalo steak after days of rice and lentil soup (Dal Bhat). We spent the next day hunting the ridge lines above Namche in drifts of *Primula denticulata*, *Euphorbia wallichii*, *Thermopsis barbata* and another heart-stopping plant, *Iris kemaonensis*. Walking through barren alpine scrub with large desert-like patches, we stumbled across a swathe of stunning white and azure-

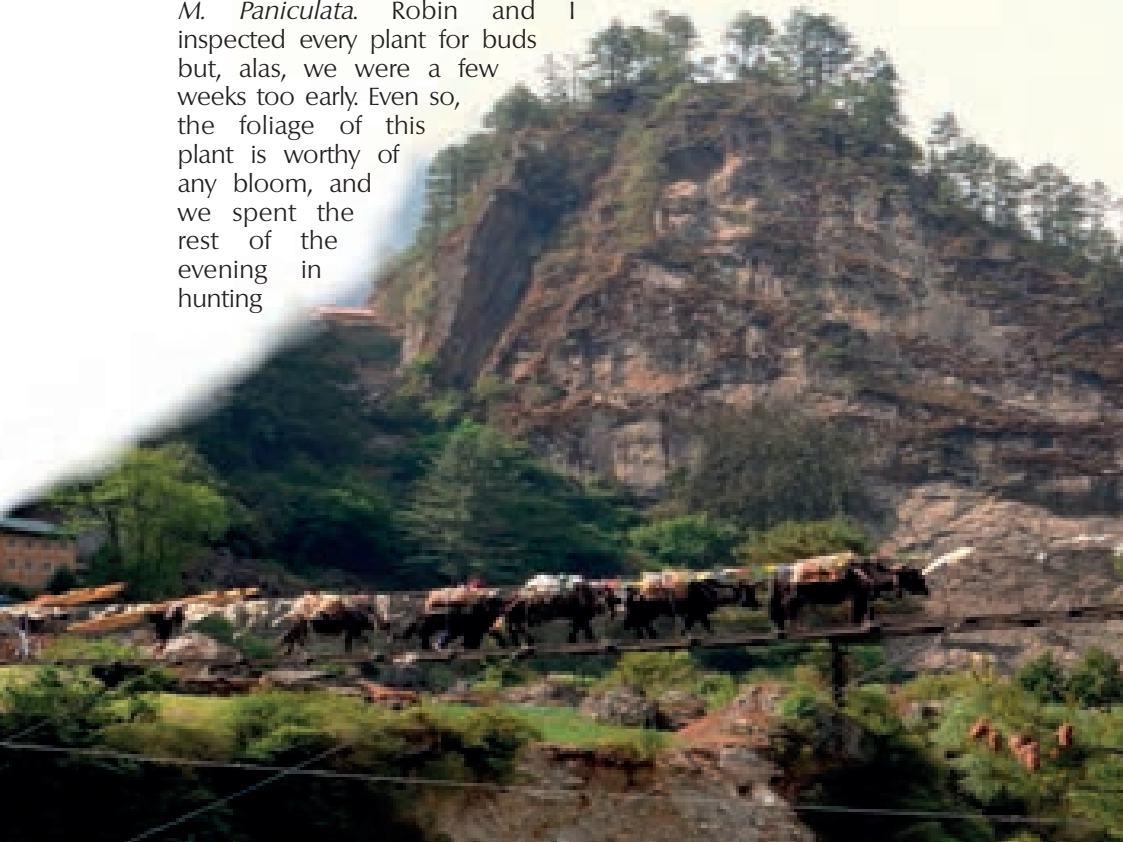
Giving way to a team of Yak Buffalo on the Phakding bridge.



Swallowtails were common to 5000 metres

blue palm-sized iris flowers. Unfortunately this iris was also admired by the packs of passing mammals who ate entire patches of flowers, leaving only stalks for us to ponder.

The next two days we tramped to Dole (4038 m) and then Machermo (4410 m). We started early in the mornings so we could explore further up the adjoining valleys once our packs were dropped off at the next tea house. Each village had a meandering stream leading into the mountains, bordered by fields of calf-high *Rhododendron nivale* and thousands of *Primula macrophylla*. *Pedicularis* species were just breaking their ferny rosettes through the surface along with masses of *Meconopsis simplicifolia*. Whenever Clint got a sniff of this beauty he was off like a bloodhound. I was not familiar with it but knew it must be a stunner from Clint's determination to find one in bloom. On one of the banks I spotted some interesting plants and headed over, to find a fine large scattering of *M. Paniculata*. Robin and I inspected every plant for buds but, alas, we were a few weeks too early. Even so, the foliage of this plant is worthy of any bloom, and we spent the rest of the evening in hunting





A strikingly azure *Iris kemaonensis* stands out in desert conditions (3600 m)

the river flats for any other treasures. An emerging *Corydalis cashmeriana* was another special find as were *Oxyria digyna* and *Myricaria rosea*. Clint returned from a mountain goat climb up a side stream with a huge grin. "I got one!" he gloated as we crammed around his camera. Wedged between large boulders was *Meconopsis simplicifolia*, its scrumpled violet petals not quite ready to unravel to the world ... a skiff of snow the night before would not have helped move Mother Nature along.

The walk up to Gokyo (5357 m) is a surreal experience; the long trail winds up the valley before hitting an exhausting rock staircase. We found many cushion plants such as *Saxifraga engleriana* wedged in crevices and outcrops, with other saxifrages and androsaces. The final ridge climb revealed a suspended valley and a series of lakes stretching to the Gokyo

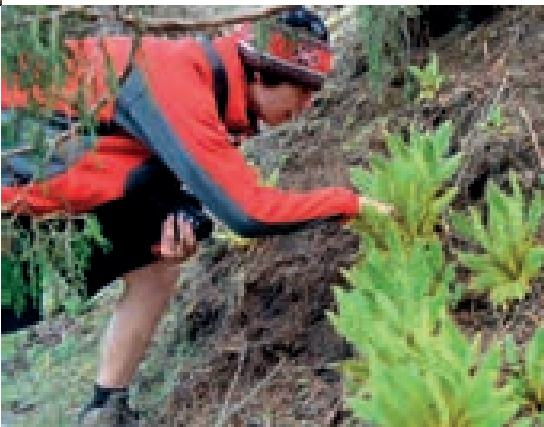
village and beyond to Mount Cho Oyo (8201 m); beyond that - China. The evening was freezing cold and we joined the other ten hikers jostling for the warmth of the yak paddies fire.

Four o'clock in the morning - and we shivered our way along the lake shore heading for the base of Gokyo Ri. The trail felt close to vertical, especially with the forces of altitude working against us. The other guys all had knee injuries, one consistently vomited every 200 metres, while I felt exhausted and had a pressing headache. Still we pressed on to reach the lookout before the sun rose behind Everest. The view was breath-taking, with the Ngozumpa glacier snaking its way down the valley, itself bordered by rows of mountain giants - four of the highest in the world - Cho Oyu, Everest, Lhotse and Makalu, all over 8000 metres.

After an amazing sunrise and a well-deserved rest we zig-zagged for our descent, hunting new treasures. Among the rocky slopes we found some interesting emerging plants, possibly species of *Cremanthodium* and *Lagotis*. We returned to our hut, quickly packed, rushed down a breakfast of yak's milk pancakes and headed for home.

Robin Callens inspects rosettes of *Meconopsis paniculata* for buds

Drifts of *Primula macrophylla* in and alongside running water (Dole, 4000 m)



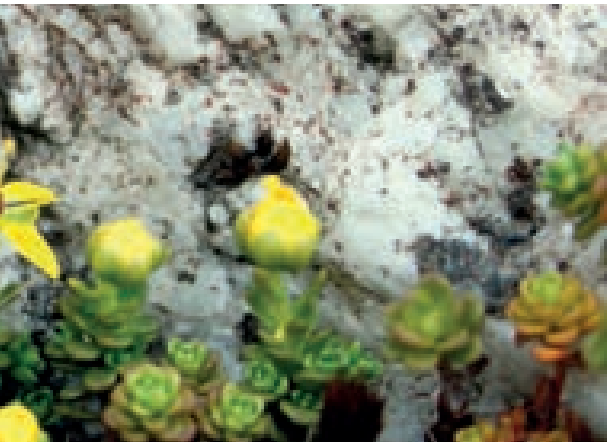
The moods of the expedition party were lifted now that we were returning to homes, families and Sunday lamb roasts. Our better understanding of the lie of the land and habitats led us to many more exciting finds such as *Podophyllum hexandrum*, *Pleione hookeriana*, *Rodgersia* and species of *Roscoea*.

Goblin forests of *Rhododendron campanulatum* and *Prunus rufa* revealed the highlight of the final day, *Paris marmorata*. These beautiful plants were scattered around a *Cardiocrinum*

A lone white *Primula denticulata* stood among a sea of pink flowers. Namche Bazaar (3600 m)

*giganteum* colony, their eye-catching silver-striped markings forming a specimen I yearn to worship in a shady spot of my garden. There were very many other plants I'd love to mention: anemones, potentillas, many members of the Leguminosae family, and a two metre *Polygonatum* species. The list is too long for one story!

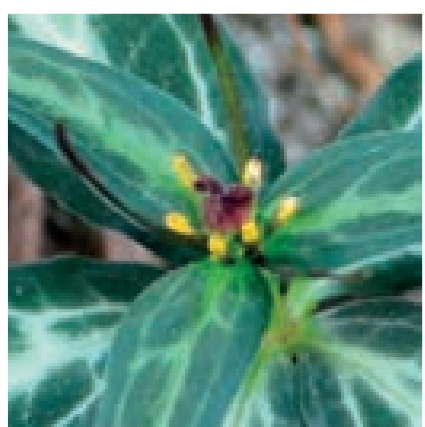
*Saxifraga engleriana* in crevices and rock faces above Machermo (4500 m)





The highlight of our expedition, *Paris marmorata* - a stunning specimen in deep shade (2900 m)

After returning to New Zealand I set upon the task of working out the identification of the hundreds of plants we had not been able to name. This became an impossible mission, especially when I couldn't even decide on family names. I was pointed towards a local expert, William Sykes, who has been to Nepal on botanical expeditions several times. I was inspired by his stories and hung on his every word. His journeys to Nepal began as joint ventures with Wisley and the British Museum of





An attractive *Oxytropis* species, growing in dry shade along the track beyond Namche Bazaar (3800 m)

Natural History, with other outstanding plant hunters, Oleg Polunin, Adam Stainton and John Williams. His first two expeditions lasted for six and eight months and they concentrated on primulas and rhododendrons for the appetites of influential gardeners of Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland. On his first trip in 1952, he was carried out in a basket because of serious amoebic dysentery but nevertheless managed to snap photos all the way back to civilization. I asked him about an alpine rhododendron that we had encountered many times - the local villages collected it as religious incense. He disappeared into his bedroom and returned with a small plastic bag. On holding it to my nose, I was returned immediately to the slopes above Machermo and Dole, the intensely strong but delicious aroma flooding my nostrils. He laughed at my reaction and went on to explain that he had brought home leaves of *Rhododendron anthopogon* on his second expedition in 1954. How amazing it is that a plant can hold its aroma for as long as fifty years or more - I think our chat awakened many happy memories for Bill and I look forward to returning for more about his adventures.





This botanical adventure has opened my mind to many new interesting plant families that I intend to learn more about and hope to study in the field. I thank the Scottish Rock Garden Club for the contribution towards our expedition; I am very grateful and hope I can pass on my stories in the future...





# Exploring the Arctic by Cruise Ship

Michael Scott

We walked down the gangway and along the jetty and were immediately amongst wonderful flowers. Pride of place went to the big, showy and pink flowers of Arctic River Beauty. It is related to our Rosebay Willowherb and more properly called Broad-leaved Willowherb, *Chamaenerion latifolium*, but I have always preferred its more descriptive local name. It was growing beside chunky dandelion flowers – a widespread arctic form, much showier than ours back home. A few more yards along the tarmac road, and there was a lovely patch of *Lathyrus japonica* ssp. *maritimus* (Sea Pea), with attractive, blue-violet flowers. Back home, you'd need to go to Norfolk to see this flower, as it has now apparently died out from its sole site on Shetland.

A little further, still within sight of the ship, the roadside verge had three species you could only see together in Scotland by scrambling up to the famous crags of Ben Lawers: *Veronica fruticans* (Rock Speedwell), *Erigeron borealis* (Boreal Fleabane, often wrongly called Alpine Fleabane), and *Gentiana nivalis* (Alpine or Snow Gentian) with its tiny flowers of unbelievably deep blue. Here, *Silene suecica* (Alpine Catchfly) blooms right beside the road whereas in Britain you'd have to make a long slog up an Angus Glen, visit Hobcarton Crag in the Lake District or come to our own garden to see it. Best of all, on a little crag a couple of metres above

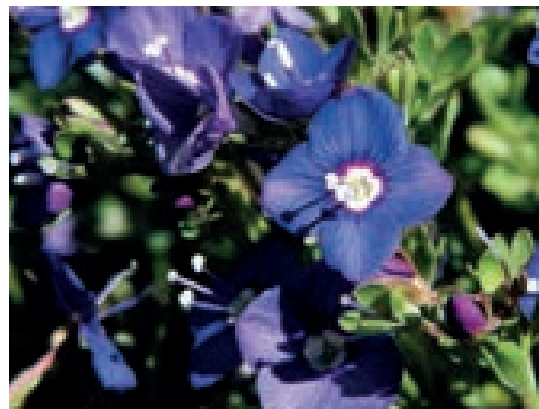
Above: Approaching Flåm from the Aurlandsfjord

(All photos by Michael Scott: <http://www.above-and-below.com>)



*Chamaenerion latifolium*, Arctic River Beauty, Flower Valley  
the road was *Saxifraga cespitosa* (Tufted Saxifrage), a plant of inaccessible crags on Snowdon and Ben Nevis, and of one remaining site in the Cairngorms that needs a 30 km round hike. Here, it was growing spectacularly within a few hundred metres of our cruise ship and all the comforts of home.

Later that afternoon, we went to escort one of the ship's official excursions, a hike to a wonderful place called Flower Valley. When I first visited it in 2005, a glacier tongue was just visible at the head. Now it has melted back round the corner, out of sight, so rapid are the changes happening in Greenland. In the moraine of the glacier's meltwater channels are lots more flowers, including more Arctic River Beauty and an arctic speciality, *Dryas integrifolia* (Entire-leaved Mountain Avens), which I'd Near Narsarsuaq: *Lathyrus japonica* ssp. *maritima* and *Veronica fruticans*





*Gentiana nivalis* on the coast at Narsarsuaq

love for our rockery but have never managed to find in cultivation.

We were in Greenland, at a little community called Narsarsuaq, meaning Big Plain. Perhaps it should be Big Plane, because this is where the Americans built the Bluie West One airbase in World War II. The runway still serves as Greenland's second international airport. But we hadn't flown here on some major botanical expedition. We'd come the easy way on this occasion, and had even sailed from Leith. We had sailed via the Faroe Islands and Iceland so there had been plenty of other opportunities to botanize along the way – and we'd had some great whale-watching as we sailed.

*Dryas integrifolia* at Narsarsuaq





### Why Cruise?

If you really want to know Greenland's flora and explore its remoter areas, you need to organize a major expedition (or pay someone to do it for you). That takes a lot of research and costs a serious amount of money. But if you just want to get a taste of what makes Greenland special, a cruise is well worth considering. It's also one of the cheapest ways to see Iceland and the easiest route to arctic Norway and Svalbard. Most such cruises start and end at British ports, avoiding the hassles of flying, and allowing you all the luggage you can carry. Cruising is a good ruse if your partner isn't quite as interested in wild flowers and gardening as you are but does enjoy good food, convivial company, stunning scenery, and some daytime and evening entertainment.

*Saxifraga cespitosa* at Heimeay

*Silene suecica* at Narsarsuaq



I should admit a bias. Since 2005, my wife Sue and I have been lucky to work as guest speakers on cruise ships. We regard them as amazing magic carpets that have so far taken us three times each to Greenland and Svalbard, and many more times to arctic Norway and Iceland. We've also cruised to the Amazon, the Chilean fjords and even the world's remotest inhabited island of Tristan da Cunha, but that's another story! On the cruises, we travel as honorary passengers so we get a real (I hope unbiased) sense of how cruising works.

There's one important distinction to make. Expedition ships are smaller than cruise ships, with generally under 100 passengers. They have fewer facilities, don't provide evening entertainment or casinos (hoorah!) but are much more versatile. Landings are usually made using rubber inflatable boats and may be 'wet landings' on a beach where you have to splash ashore in wellies. They give the opportunity to visit more remote places and explore wilder landscapes. In the Arctic, the ship may well be ice-hardened, so as to plough through ice floes without concern and take you to the remotest corners of Svalbard or Greenland.

This is all fine if you are fit, active and keen but sometimes it can seem a bit full-on. The economies of scale mean it is also expensive. You will definitely see more on an expedition ship, but it might cost three times as much as a less intensive visit by cruise ship. It comes down to choice and finances but, in our experience, you can reach amazing places on cruise ships and still have a really relaxing and enjoyable holiday. The cruise ship extras are there if desired but they are also easy to avoid, as

The small cruise ship *Discovery* in Ny Ålesund, Svalbard



Sue and I tend to do. Choose the right ship and you don't even have to worry about dressing up for formal nights if you don't want to.

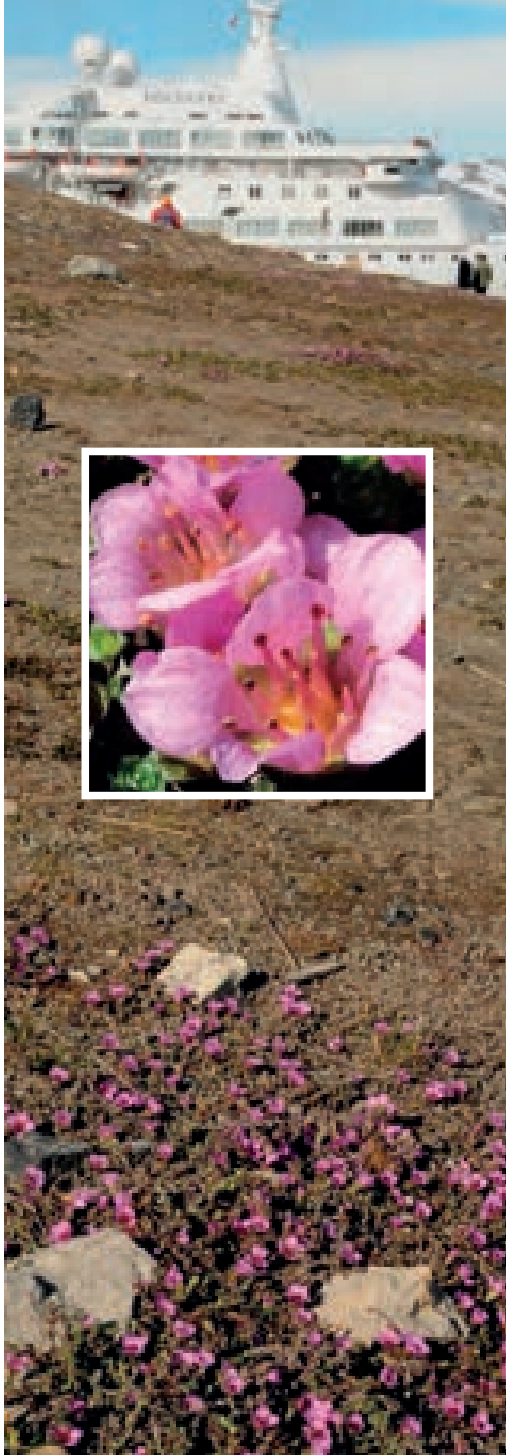
### Choosing Your Ship

Aim for a ship with 500 to 900 passengers. They have many comforts but don't overwhelm their destinations. They are flexible enough to enter interesting smaller ports but are stable at sea. Larger ships have more facilities, entertainment and eateries but can only dock at larger ports with more difficult access to wild countryside. They might only anchor off when at smaller ports, with delays as you are ferried ashore and back by tender.

Most ships have stabilisers and cope well with rough seas but if you are a bad sailor you might want to think carefully about where to visit. The Norwegian fjords are wonderful if you don't mind a brief uncomfortable crossing of the North Sea, but the wilder waters off Svalbard and Greenland might be problematic. Take sea sickness tablets with you; the ship's doctor can inject you against sea sickness but you'll probably need a tranquilliser when you get the bill!

We mainly work on British-based ships. We are of course prejudiced but would recommend: Cruise & Maritime Voyages, Fred Olsen Cruise Line, Saga Cruises and Voyages of Discovery - each has strengths and weaknesses but all offer attractive cruises on well-appointed ships at reasonable prices

*Saxifraga oppositifolia* and *Discovery*








*Andromeda polifolia*, Bog Rosemary, Honningsvåg  
*Chickweed Wintergreen*, *Trientalis europæus*, Mount Ulriken, Bergen





for what is on offer. Their ships are suitably small and friendly, currency is usually sterling, and the facilities, entertainment and excursions are predominantly aimed at the British. For those living in Scotland, some companies even offer cruises from Rosyth or Greenock, or from Newcastle or Liverpool.

### The Norwegian Fjords

The Norwegian fjords are the classic cruise destination from Britain. Stunningly beautiful, they are much easier to appreciate from the sea than the land. Although the true Arctic is a long way north, it is still easy to find interesting flowers from many of the ports further south. Bergen is included in many cruises and smaller ships typically dock just a short walk from the beautiful old quarter of Bryggen. From here, a funicular railway climbs onto Mount Fløyen (320 m) whither the ships often offer excursions (worth considering to skip the queues). There are some attractive hill walks, but the summit area is well within the forest zone and not hugely exciting botanically. We prefer to take a bus from the centre of town to the cable car that climbs Mount Ulriken (642 m). This reaches well above the treeline into some delightful mountain grassland with plants like *Rubus chamaemorus* (Cloudberry), *Trientalis europaea* (Chickweed Wintergreen), *Cornus suecica* (Dwarf Cornel) and *Andromeda polifolia*.



*Aconitum lycoctonum*,  
Northern Wolfsbane

Flåm, at the head of Aurlandsfjord, is another common call for cruise ships, sometimes combined with a brief stop at Gudvangen in the even more breathtakingly beautiful Naeroyfjord to pick up passengers from an excursion called 'Norway in a Nutshell'. The standard excursion in Flåm is a spectacular trip on the Flåmsbana, one of the world's steepest railways,

*Woodsia ilvensis*





*Rubus chamaemorus*, Cloudberry, on Ulriken outside Bergen

climbing over 860 metres in 20 kilometres. It travels so slowly uphill that there is time to spot *Geranium sylvaticum* (Wood Cranesbill) and banks of *Trientalis europaea* from the window. An even better option is to take the train almost to the summit and disembark at *Vatnahalsen*. From there, follow the signs back down to Flåm along the Rollarveg, the railway's construction service road that begins by descending a spectacular series of zigzag bends.

On the walk down I've seen masses of *Cicerbita alpina* (Alpine Sowthistle), now very rare in Scotland but common in woodland here even in front of the *Vatnahalsen* Hotel. Descending, you may spot *Cryptogramma crispa* (Parsley Fern), *Linnaea borealis* (Twinflower), *Sedum rosea* (Roseroot), Dwarf Cornel and *Campanula latifolia* (Giant Bellflower), none of which are easy plants to find in Britain, as well as some species that are not native back home, such as *Maianthemum bifolium* (May Lily) and *Aconitum lycoctonum*. The best plan is to time your walk to pick up the train again at Berekvam, reducing walking to about nine kilometres. This hike may be offered as an organized excursion; if doing it yourself, book your train tickets online in advance because if more than one cruise ship is in port the morning trains are soon fully booked.

It may help to add a word about ship's excursions. They may seem expensive but they include all incidental costs, such as the guides who

Border: *Cicerbita alpina*, Alpine Sowthistle, on the Rollarveg near Flåm



*Maianthemum biflorum*, May Lily, Rollarveg, Flåm

can add greatly to your enjoyment of the visit, and a ship's escort. They often include food, which is otherwise expensive in all the countries I'm describing. Although you may be able to arrange your own trips more cheaply, remember that, although ships will never leave before all passengers have returned from official excursions, they will not wait for delayed independent passengers. It can be very expensive, or sometimes impossible, to catch up with the ship at the next port and generally your travel insurance will not cover those costs.

An alternative in Flåm is just a gentle walk up the valley to the dramatic Brekkefoss waterfall (local route maps are usually available in the railway station). By the track, you might spot beautiful flowery heads of *Verbascum nigrum* (Dark Mullein) and the solitary crowns of *Cirsium heterophyllum* (Melancholy Thistle). By the waterfall, we've found wonderful plants of *Woodsia ilvensis* (Oblong Woodsia), a fern that is so desperately rare in Scotland that it has needed 'life support' at some sites. One lush plant we saw by the Brekkefoss probably had more fronds than all the Oblong Woodsias in Scotland!

#### Arctic Norway

These are just steps on the journey. The best cruises will take you north of the Arctic Circle. Often, they pass the little island with a metal globe that is meant to mark this theoretical line, defined as the latitude north of which the midnight sun is seen on at least one night a year.

Border: *Geranium sylvaticum* in woods near Tromsø Botanic Garden



*Phyllodoce caerulea*, Blue Heath, and  
*Dryas octopetala*, the SRGC Emblem, both at Honningsvåg





White-flowered *Saxifraga oppositifolia* at Longyearbyen, *Silene acaulis* at Nordkapp, and *Pinguicula alpina* at Honningsvåg



Actually, the island is a couple of hundred metres south of the Arctic Circle but it still makes a nice landmark. It is great to sail to the Arctic from Britain because you get a real sense of the changing landscape as you head north, feeling the air get colder and noticing how the treeline creeps down the hills towards the shoreline until eventually there are no trees at all.



One of the commonest stops on the way is Tromsø, one of our favourites. The normal dock is a five minute walk from the wonderful Tromsø Botanic Garden that has featured regularly on these pages. No matter how much you have read about this place, it will never fail to surprise you. It's much more 'domestic' than I expected, right in the midst of town, but its diversity of colour and species is astounding. The arctic summer is all too short but most cruises are perfectly timed to see the garden at its best (don't expect to see anything if you book a *Northern Lights* winter cruise). One tip here: in the top right-hand corner of the garden, as viewed from the entrance, a path leads up through birch woodland to university buildings above. The wild flora in this wood is just as spectacular as the gardens below. It has masses of Dwarf Cornel, fine plants of Alpine Sowthistle, some glorious *Trollius europaeus* (Globeflower) and, if you search hard enough, even *Paris*





*Pedicularis dasyantha*, Woolly Lousewort, Longyearbyen, Svalbard

*quadrifolia* (Herb Paris). Sheila Brinkley wrote intriguingly in *The Rock Garden* in 2006 about Mount Fløya, accessible from the cable car to Storsteinen (Big Rock), 421 metres above sea level, which ship excursions visit all-too-briefly; I've been meaning to head there ever since but my recent visits to this Arctic city have been too short and the Botanic Garden just too tempting!

The best cruises take you even further north to the delightful little village of Honningsvåg. I thoroughly recommend an excursion to Nordkapp, allegedly the northernmost point of mainland Europe at 71°11'08"N. Actually, it's a double cheat because an inaccessible peninsula a little to the west reaches more than a kilometre further north, and anyway all of this is on an island called Magerøya, connected to the mainland by a road tunnel. Nevertheless, Nordkapp feels a suitably dramatic place, especially if your excursion is timed for the midnight sun. It feels weird to be botanizing at midnight but on the clifftop you can find *Saxifraga oppositifolia* (Purple Saxifrage), Tufted Saxifrage, delightful cushions of *Silene acaulis* (Moss Campion), *Salix*

Border: Ice floes in the Isfjord in Svalbard





*Papaver dahlianum*, Svalbard Poppy, Longyearbyen

*herbacea* (Dwarf Willow) and some very small-leaved *Dryas octopetala* (Mountain Avens), my favourite arctic-alpine and our club's emblem.

You might have time to wander a little way out of Honningsvåg. In any direction we have easily found a rich variety of flowers. For example, on the gentle slope above the main road just at the outskirts of the village heading north-west, in about an hour of exploring, we found - among many others - masses of Mountain Avens, *Tofieldia pusilla* (Scots Asphodel), *Kalmia procumbens* (Mountain Azalea) and *Phyllodoce caerulea* (Blue Heath) – a quartet that would have me salivating with joy in Scotland. There were also some delicate plants of *Pinguicula alpina* (Alpine Butterwort), now extinct in Scotland.

### Svalbard

Search through the summer cruises from British ports and you will normally find a few that offer the amazing opportunity to get even further north, to Svalbard. Beware, this is the real Arctic. The crossing can be a bit wild, and the island of Bjørnøya that you pass *en route* is most often hidden in fog. The only possible landings are on the main island of Spitsbergen, usually beginning with the capital Longyearbyen, but



*Potentilla pulchella*, Tufted Cinquefoil, Longyearbyen

once we didn't get even there. We were wakened in the middle of the night by the noise of ice floes scraping past the ship. We dashed up on deck to a dramatic scene of ice as far as the eye could see in the golden early morning light. Our ship was ice-hardened but even so we had to drop speed to about three knots. Then we were told that the port authorities had closed the ports, concerned that the ice might get denser and trap ships. We had no choice but to turn and head to sea once more. Sue and I were content as we already had a booking to return the next year but we felt heart-sorry for the passengers for whom this trip was a life's ambition. However, we were rewarded by the amazing sight of about a dozen walruses on the ice floes, which we would never ordinarily expect to see from a cruise ship, together with lots of other wildlife.

Even ashore on Spitsbergen can be frustrating. You are not allowed to leave the environs of Longyearbyen without a guide, armed with a shotgun in case of Polar Bear attacks (and two or three of these massive beasts are seen in the town every year). However, even wandering between the port and the town centre we have found such arctic delights as *Potentilla pulchella* (Tufted Cinquefoil), *Cassiope tetragona* (White Arctic Bell-heather), *Ranunculus sulphureus* (Sulphur-coloured Buttercup), *Pedicularis dasyantha* (Woolly Lousewort) and the endemic *Papaver dahlianum* (Svalbard Poppy). The strange little research community at Ny Ålesund at 78°58'N is even more frustrating, because here you may not leave the track that loops round the village, despite all the tantalising tundra just beyond. This is partly to protect the Barnacle Geese that breed

here but mostly to protect us from Polar Bears. Despite that restriction, it's easy to see masses of Purple, Tufted and Drooping Saxifrage, *Saxifraga cernua*, and maybe spot an Ivory Gull or an Arctic Fox.

## Iceland

Many cruises to Iceland stop at the Faroe Islands. Torshavn is a delightful port town but not especially flowery, so an excursion from here is worth considering. We especially enjoy the hike to the columnar basalts of Streymoy Sill where you might spot Moss Campion and *Saxifraga hypnoides* (Mossy Saxifrage), as well as some large-flowered *Dactylorhiza maculata* ssp. *ericetorum* (Heath Spotted Orchids). A few smaller ships call in at Heimaey in Iceland's Westmann Islands, highly recommended. In 1973 the nearby Eldfell volcano erupted and came close to obliterating the main town and its harbour. The resultant three square kilometre lava field has been colonized by amazingly tough arctic survivors, including Roseroot, Tufted Saxifrage, *Arabidopsis petraea* (Northern Rock-cress), and *Oxyria digyna* (Mountain Sorrel). It's intriguing to see how lupins such as

The Lava Garden at Eldfell, Heimaey





*Arabis alpina*, Alpine Rock-cress, on the lava field at Eldfell, Heimaeý *Lupinus nootkatensis* are being used to bring some fertility to this barren landscape, and the beautiful lava garden - crafted by sheer determination in the midst of all this volcanic debris - is a must-see for any gardener.

The capital of Reykjavik is the most visited port. Its botanic garden is a little disappointing, with only a small corner dedicated to the island's indigenous flora, so an excursion is worth considering. The classic trip is the Golden Circle tour. The main stop is at Thingvellir, where the European and American tectonic plates are tearing themselves apart, leaving an intriguing rift valley. Even on the short tour walk here, you can see lots of arctic alpins including Mountain Avens again, Oblong Woodsia, Moss Champion, Boreal Fleabane, *Salix lanata* (Woolly Willow) and *Arabis alpina* (Alpine Rock-cress), which in Scotland you can only see with great effort in the Cuillin hills of Skye. At the Gullfoss waterfall stop, look out for another scarce British species, *Bartsia alpina* (Alpine Bartsia) and, if you can tear yourself away from the pulsing heart of the geysers at the place that gave them their name, Geysir, you might find Moss Champion, *Cerastium nigrescens* (Arctic Chickweed) and - yes - Mountain Avens again.

Border: *Potentilla tridentata*, Three-toothed Cinquefoil, Narsaaq, Greenland

If you're booking a cruise that goes all the way to Iceland, I'd recommend one that also visits some of the smaller ports. Akureyri is one of my favourites, with an excellent botanic garden that has delightful displays of island endemics and stunningly colourful herbaceous borders that defy the climate and take full advantage of 24-hour daylight. The excursion from here to Lake Myvatn and the extraordinary volcanic landscape of Dimmuborgir is well worth considering, because there are lots of interesting flowers to spot.

Wherever we have called in Iceland, we have found great



Above: *Coptis trifolia*, Goldthread, at Qaaqarsuaq, Greenland

Left: *Koenigia islandica*, Iceland Purslane, at Djúpivogur in the country of its name. Inset: tiny plants are just visible beside *Saxifraga aizoides*.

Below: *Saxifraga cernua*, Drooping Saxifrage, growing in the shelter of the Yellow River Station, the Chinese research base in Ny Ålesund.





*Ledum groenlandicum*, Greenland Labrador-tea, Qaqortoq, Greenland  
Opposite: *Lomatogonium rotatum*, Marsh Felwort, Nanortalik, Greenland 🇬🇩  
*Salix phylicifolia*, Tea-leaved Willow, Thingvellir, Iceland







botanizing just a short way from the port. At Ísafjörður on the north coast, we walked half a mile west out of the village and found carpets of colour on the slopes overlooking the fjord. At Grundarfjörður in the far west, there is a lot to be seen in the hills just behind the town, and at Seyðisfjörður in the east I'd recommend a trip to Skalanes to see the amazing habitat restoration work Oli Petursson is doing there with the help, amongst others, of ecologists from Glasgow. Just south, at Djúpvogur, I found lots of interest on a short walk along the coast, including an intriguing combination of *Saxifraga hirculus* (Yellow Marsh Saxifrage) and *Koenigia islandica*, plants which have a very different ecology in Scotland but in this case were growing side by side.

### Greenland

Iceland is fascinating but its memory fades into insignificance if your cruise then travels westwards to Greenland (two countries, incidentally, whose names definitely are the wrong way round). The crossing itself may be wild but is spectacular and is one of the best whale-watching trips in the world. This is where I saw my first Blue Whale, and Fin and Humpback Whales are common.

I've already described wonderful botanizing at Narsarsuaq. At another port of Narsaq, the first thing we saw when we landed from the tenders was Alpine Gentian. The roadside verges are covered in *Potentilla tridentata* (Three-toothed Cinquefoil), a creeping, white-flowered species that we have managed to establish in our rockery. Arctic River Beauty and *Papaver radicum* (Arctic Poppy) are common in any disturbed ground

Opposite: As 0000 hours approaches, crowds gather at the Nordkapp globe, supposedly at the northernmost point of Europe, to witness the midnight sun

Below: The Botanic Gardens in Tromsø



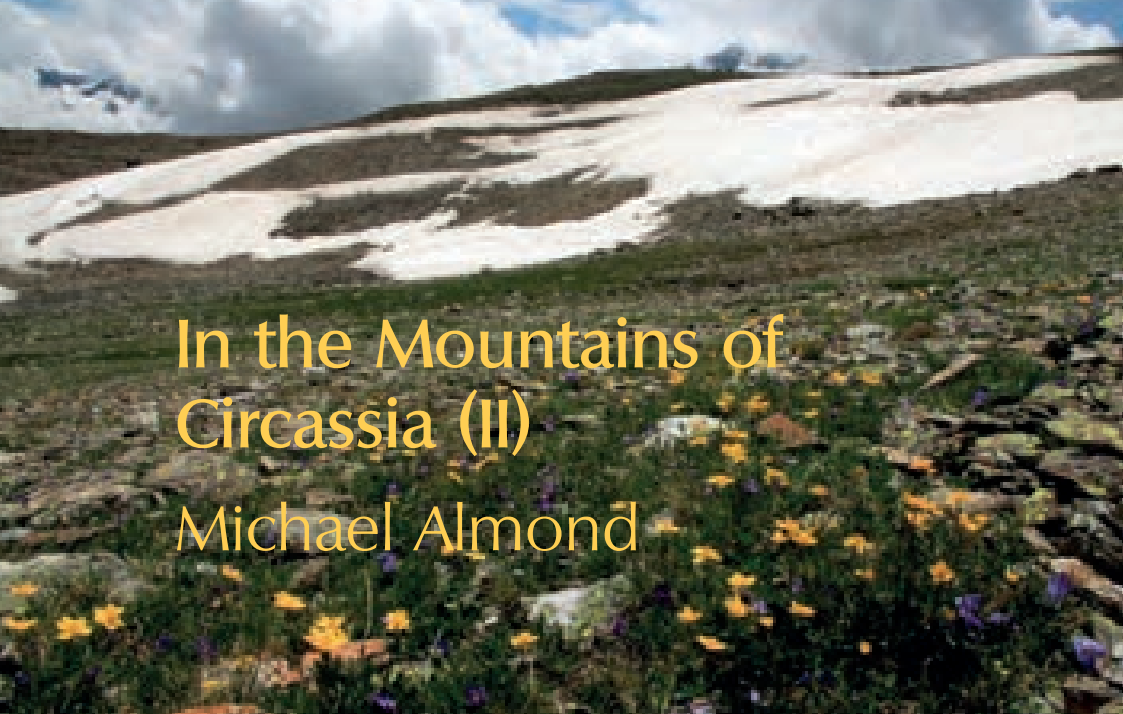
and we found lots of interesting plants on the slopes of Qaaqarsuaq, the peak that dominates the town, including *Diapensia lapponica* and delightful, anemone-like *Coptis trifolia* (Goldthread).

At Qaqortoq, the highlight is a walk around Lake Tasersuaq, where there are masses of *Leucorchis albida* and *Platanthera hyperborea* (respectively Small White and Northern Green Orchids), *Ledum groenlandicum* (appropriately enough, Greenland Labrador-tea), and *Saxifraga paniculata* (Paniculate Saxifrage). At Nanortalik, one of the specialities we found along the shore was *Lomatogonium rotatum* (Marsh Felwort), a blue-flowered gentian with four or five petal-lobes. Even on the outskirts of the capital, Nuuk, on a thoroughly wet and miserable day we found lots of interest, including sodden cotton-wool heads of *Eriophorum scheuchzeri* (Arctic Cottongrass) and carpets of *Diapensia lapponica*.

I've only been able to give a taste of the sites visited (I'd love to write a book on the subject if any publisher is interested!) but I hope I have persuaded readers that cruising can be an easy, comfortable and very rewarding way to get to some exciting places and see some remarkable plants. We'd be delighted to meet up with some SRGC members on our future cruises to the wonderful flowery wilds of the Arctic.

Michael Scott is a natural history writer, consultant and photographer. He is currently writing a book on *Mountain Flowers for the British Wildlife Collection*. This summer (2014), he and Sue are guest speakers on board *Discovery* for three *Cruise & Maritime Voyages* cruises from Scotland: to Iceland, including Akureyri, Ísafjörður and Heimaey, from Greenock; to the North Cape, including Honningsvåg, the North Cape and Tromsø, from Leith; and to Flåm and the southern fjords, also from Leith (see p. 123 for more details). Details of all cruises by Michael & Sue are also available at [http://bit.ly/cruise\\_MMS](http://bit.ly/cruise_MMS).





# In the Mountains of Circassia (II)

Michael Almond

Picking up my tale from where your editor left you in Issue 131 ... Dombai itself lies at 1600 metres at the head of the Teberda valley, below the mighty rock curtain of the main Caucasus ridge. Between it and the Tumanli Kel in the Klukhor valley rises the great mass of Musa Achitara, named as Musat-Cheri on the Russian military survey map. You can get to the summit of this mountain (at weekends only in July) by means of a cable car and a two-stage chair lift. So we were able to spend two delightful days among the flowers on this mountain.

The upper terminus of the cable car is at 2300 metres. The meadows in this area fairly took our breath away. The hillsides were yellow with *Lilium monadelphum*, interspersed with which was bright pink *Pyrethrum coccineum*, *Polygonum carneum* and *Betonica grandiflora*, white *Silene vulgaris*, vivid blue *Dracocephalum ruyschiana*, pink *Centaurea nigrofimbria*, white *C. cheiranthifolia* and geraniums of varying hue. In places there were *Gymnadenia conopsea*, *Anthemis caucasica*, *Campanula latifolia*, *Aconitum nasutum* and towering clumps of hogweed, probably *Heracleum leskovii* and *H. sosnowskyi*.

Beneath the second-stage chair-lift the hillside was at first carpeted with bright yellow *Pulsatilla aurea* and higher up with blue *Campanula biebersteiniana*. As the hillsides got steeper and rockier, we also found a lot of *Anemone speciosa*, usually bright yellow but sometimes a

Above and below: *Anemone speciosa* and *Campanula biebersteiniana*





restrained lemon-yellow colour, together with patches of pink and mauve *Corydalis conorhiza*. We also found an attractive, bright-yellow crucifer which may be *Erucastrum armoracioides*. On the scree below the top station of this chair-lift there were some large mats of the ice-blue *Veronica telephiifolia*.

The lower stage of the chair lift ends on a ridge just under 3000 metres above sea level. The immediate area around the chair-lift station is littered with the booths of souvenir sellers and food merchants and is polluted with the raucous pop (pap?) they insist on pumping out into the ether – all catering to the swarm of tourists who take advantage of the cable car and chair lift. But very few of them stray far from the top of the lift and, thankfully, even the ‘music’ fades away eventually. Between this ridge and the summit ridge (up to which the top section of the chair-lift goes) is a shallow valley, round the head of which the lower ridge curves and then rises up to the summit of the mountain, given on the maps as 3012 metres. The slope down from the ridge into the valley is a mass of *Anemone speciosa*, *Campanula biebersteiniana* and *Gentiana pyrenaica*. On a rocky outcrop in the bottom of the valley we found some fine specimens of *Campanula saxifraga*, including one group which was a much lighter mauve than usual.


*Veronica telephiifolia* and (border) its rocky habitat at the top of the chair lift



Light-coloured form of *Campanula saxifraga*

*Anthemis caucasica*





The scree on the other side of the valley rises up towards the summit ridge, gently at first with plenty of grass and other herbage between the rocks. These lower slopes were a riot of colour: great drifts of *Campanula biebersteiniana* in various shades (mainly pale mauve, but some much darker and some white), often interspersed with *Anemone speciosa*; also *Pedicularis nordmanniana*, *P. subrostrata*, *Veronica gentianoides* and *Potentilla caucasica*.

*Campanula biebersteiniana* and *Pedicularis nordmanniana*

Higher up, as the slope got steeper and rockier, *Gentiana pyrenaica*, *Myosotis alpestris*, *Eritrichium caucasicum* and *Corydalis alpestris* began to appear. On the rocky scree higher still we found *Minuartia caucasica*, *Cerastium cerastoides*, *Sibbaldia parviflora*, *Anthemis iberica*, *Taraxacum haemanthum* and *Senecio caucasigenus*. There was a larger concentration here of *Eritrichium caucasicum* than we saw anywhere else. This plant, although no rival to the King of the Alps, can have a very attractive light blue colour in its diminutive flowers. The loose scree here, underneath the top section of the chair-lift, also had a remarkably large amount of beautiful blue *Corydalis alpestris* scrambling through it. As we have learnt elsewhere in the Caucasus, the colours of *C. conorhiza* and *C. alpestris* overlap. The former varies considerably in colour, from red through purple – the most common colour – to blue (and we once saw a yellow one); the latter, although usually sky blue, occasionally takes on a purplish tinge. They may be distinguished by their habitat, however: *C. conorhiza* grows in silt whereas *C. alpestris* grows in rocky scree.



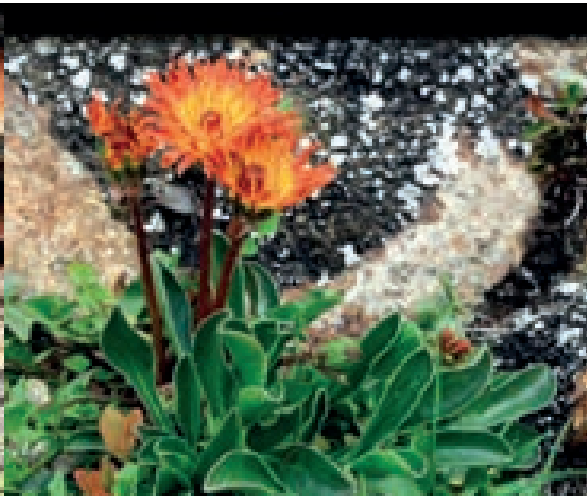


*Eritrichium caucasicum* with *Gentiana pyrenaica*

On the ridges themselves – the lower ridge as it rose up towards the summit and the summit ridge itself – there was a multitude of choice flowers. Of particular note was a form of *Primula elatior* ssp. *meyeri* described as ‘forma *rupestris*’ (the ‘normal’ form which we saw at Lagonaki being described as ‘forma *pratensis*’). When I first heard about it I was very sceptical about this differentiation into two forms. We have seen *P. elatior* ssp. *meyeri* in a wide range of habitats from Turkey to the eastern Caucasus and from relatively low altitude (as at Lagonaki) to over 3000 metres. Although it is very variable in flower colour, from deep carmine to pale pink, with the occasional white thrown in for good measure (and once, in Turkey, a solitary yellow flower among a population

*Senecio caucasigenus*

*Taraxacum haemanthum*







*Corydalis alpestris*

of pink, at too high an altitude, I believe, for it to have been any other subspecies of *P. elatior*), the range of variation of this primula is similar everywhere. I could see no reason, therefore, why an attempt should be made to split it into two forms. But the plants on Musa Achitara definitely looked different from any we had seen elsewhere. We did not see many plants of it in flower there but the ones we did see were all of the same colour and habit. It is difficult to explain why exactly it looked distinctive, but it did. And it cannot be put down solely to the conditions, because we have seen plenty of the 'normal' form ('forma *pratensis*' if you like) in similar conditions. The only other primula we saw hereabouts was a solitary *Primula algida*.

On the ridge there were also large clumps of gentians, both *Gentiana pyrenaica* and the large-flowered Caucasian spring gentian *G. angulosa*, together with *Campanula biebersteiniana*, *C. saxifraga*, *Potentilla caucasica*, *Veronica gentianoides*, *V. telephiifolia*, *Myosotis alpestris*, *Eritrichium caucasicum* and a *Cerastium* species. At one point were several plants of *Jurinella*. *J. moschus* and *J. subcaulis* are supposed to be differentiated by the shape of their leaves: the latter used to be called *J. moschus* ssp. *pinnatisecta* and has pinnatisect leaves whereas the former does not. However, in this small population the shape of the leaves varied from plant to plant and, indeed, in at least one case there were both pinnatisect and non-pinnatisect leaves on the same plant. Among the larger rocks at the edge of the ridge we found a very attractive white crucifer, *Dentaria pinnata*, along with *Saxifraga moschata*, *S. scleropoda*,



*Gentiana angulosa*

*Senecio caucasicgenus*, *Chamaescadium acaule*, *Lamium tomentosum* and *Corydalis alpestris*.

Parts of the summit were a patchwork of light-blue mats of *Veronica telephiifolia* and there was also a large amount of *Campanula biebersteiniana*, including some fine bicoloured forms, and *Gentiana pyrenaica*, interspersed with patches of *Anemone speciosa* and the occasional *Aster alpinus*, *Alchemilla sericea*, *Lloydia serotina*, *Eritrichium caucasicum*, *Pedicularis nordmanniana* and *P. subrostrata* – the last two, both small and pink, being distinguished by the shape of the ‘beak’ and the hairiness of the stem. There were one or two more patches of *Primula elatior* ssp. *meyeri* ‘forma *rupestris*’. On the rocks we saw other species of *Minuartia* – possibly *M. circassica*, *Eunomia rotundifolia*, *Draba brunifolia* and some beautiful blush-pink *Androsace albana*, together with several handsome clumps of *Campanula saxifraga*.

On the cliffs at the southern edge of the ridge we found large patches of the pink-flowered *Potentilla divina* (*oweriniana*) that was unfortunately not yet in flower – although we have seen it in flower further east, at the other side of Elbrus – together with *Saxifraga exarata*.

Also on the cliffs, mostly in positions too dangerous to attempt to photograph close up, were vivid yellow patches of *Draba bryoides*, sharing the rock faces with light green and brilliant orange lichens.



*Gentiana pyrenaica*  
*Campanula saxifraga*





*Androsace albana*

### Conclusion

When you stand on the summit of Musa Achitara and survey the surrounding landscape – one of lofty peaks with almost vertical sides, only broken by the precipitous and boulder-strewn torrents cascading down to the distant valley floor two thousand metres below, you realise how indefatigable the Barretts were. If there is any tendency to underestimate their achievement when reading Gilbert Barrett's articles, this will be instantly dismissed when viewing the landscape they covered. In their day the chair lift did not reach the summit of Musa Achitara. And not only did they explore Musa Achitara but they also undertook half-a-dozen or more treks up the mountains and steep valleys all around which we did not even contemplate and certainly would have failed to accomplish. We ourselves had a successful trip and were pleased that we had managed to visit some areas not explored by the Barretts; and we also ended up with a better appreciation of the achievements of those intrepid pioneers.

### Acknowledgement

I am grateful to the Canadian member who pointed out that my "*Linum hypericifolium*" on page 9 of Issue 131 should have been captioned as *Delphinium speciosum*.



*Draba bryoides*

Avoid excessive effort - use the cable car to the sky



# 65 ... But not Retiring!

Christine Boulby

Fifty eight members of the North Northumberland Group of the SRGC met at Howick Hall on Thursday October 24th for a visit to the gardens to mark the group's 65th anniversary. Howick Hall is an inspirational but modestly promoted garden close to the Northumberland coast near Alnwick. The gardens are deliberately aimed at garden lovers, with the extensive grounds offering a wide variety of plants throughout the year.

Our group was a mix of old and new members, notably Mary Craster - a member with the club for forty years, SRGC President Carole Bainbridge, and long-time friends of our group - Ron McBeath and his wife.

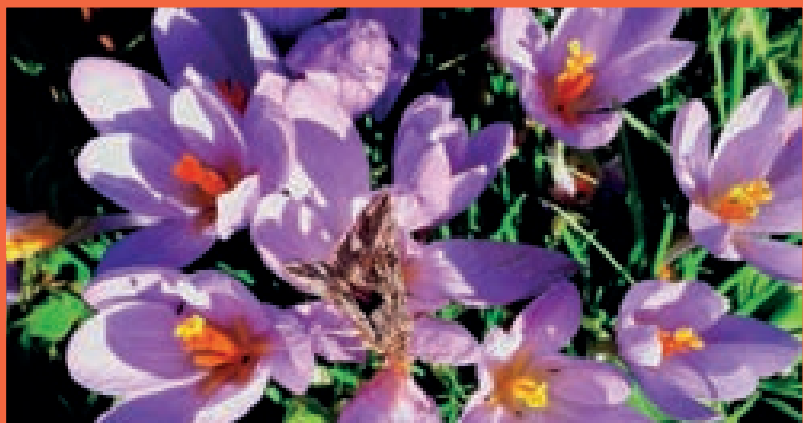
The visit included a special treat to a behind-the-scenes visit to the greenhouses and propagating facilities as well as a garden tour by the head gardener, Robert Jamieson. Robert had joined the gardens as a youngster, at first working alongside his father before going on to study horticulture and eventually returning as head gardener to the estate. In more recent years he and Lord Howick have been part of plant hunting expeditions to China and elsewhere in conjunction with the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh. Robert's boundless enthusiasm for the gardens kept us captivated throughout the tour. Of great interest to us all were the 'air pots' being used to grow young saplings and shrubs in the greenhouses, together with the autumn colour provided by countless *Cercidiphyllum*, *Acer* and a particular *Pterocarya macroptera* var. *insignis* seen in the bog garden area.

The autumn tints looked wonderful against a blue sky and we were blessed with a lovely day to stroll in the grounds. This was followed by an address by Mike Dale who wished the club well for its future. A delicious home-cooked lunch in the Earl Grey Tea Rooms by Mary & Karen Jamieson was followed by an illustrated lecture by Robert about the founding of the bog garden on the estate. The day was wrapped up by the serving of teas (Earl Grey of course!)

Border: *Pterocarya macroptera* var. *insignis* in the bog garden at Howick







*Acer palmatum* var. *dissectum* and a long-established *Crocus* with visitor







## Putting on the SRGC Shows

Sandy Leven,  
Stan da Prato &  
Graham Wenham

The Scottish Rock Garden Club has been running its own shows since before World War II. They were magnificent events held in Edinburgh's Waverley Market and Glasgow's McLaren Galleries. After the war the shows increased in number as local groups staged their own events. These days we stage eight per year, organized by the local groups. In addition the club has a distinguished track record of mounting displays at national garden shows that started with the Royal Highland flower shows held in huge marquees.

### Scottish Chelsea

In 1996 The Royal Horticultural Society announced that there would be a 'Scottish Chelsea'. Strathclyde Park was chosen as the venue. The SRGC was invited to participate. Sandy Leven, as the then SRGC publicity manager, was asked to organize the club's exhibit. His membership of the RHS Joint Rock Garden Committee meant that he had visited most Chelsea Flower shows since 1993 and had an idea of what the RHS expected in a successful exhibit.

We had admired the displays staged by the Alpine Garden Society at Chelsea so Sandy sought advice from Kath Dryden and Mary Randall. Kath advised that "the RHS did not like troughs on displays"! However, we wanted to involve as many SRGC members and groups as possible and by using troughs we could achieve this. We were allocated a central square 6 m x 6 m in a square marquee. At each corner was a

2009 - Ian Christie's SRGC exhibit

group of different sized troughs. Since each trough was made and planted by a different SRGC member we had a wide range of plants. Ian Young had been developing his revolutionary Aberdonian idea of converting polystyrene fish boxes into alpine troughs. These are strong but light to handle and enabled us to have much of the planting done before the show. The central area of the site was an eight square metre herbaceous garden built around a large *Pieris forrestii* dug up from the garden of Sandy's late mother who lived in Falkland in Fife. The RBGE lent us a good number of trilliums that they had kept in a cold store to hold back flowering. Evelyn Stevens supplied several *Meconopsis*. Sandy & Anne Leven provided hostas, heucheras, grasses and background plants. We sourced stone boulders from a local quarry. The centre bed was planted up by Evelyn Stevens and Diana Davis, both from the Stirling group. A pallet load of bags of 5 mm gravel covered the unplanted patio area. It took several journeys to transport all the material in a hired van. Alongside the display we had a publicity stand, from which we sold hundreds of copies of the trough-making leaflet to cover our costs. We did not use all the troughs all the time! Some were on the publicity stand. Whenever we realized that someone whose trough was in reserve was coming to see the display we moved their trough into a prominent position. All this hard work was rewarded by our first RHS gold medal.

The RHS held two further shows at Strathclyde Park. Jim Jermyn's outstanding exhibit was a large garden built inside the marquee. He has since become show manager for *Gardening Scotland* but in 1997 was one of the few Scottish alpine nurseries with a RHS gold medal. In 1998 we were allotted 36 square metres but the shape was 9 m x 4 m. For this we needed a joiner so we called on Glassford Sprunt, who is an orthopaedic surgeon. He constructed a large base on which we built a rock garden, shady at the back and sunny with a patio deck at the front, painted iris-blue. This colour lightened the decking and gave a feeling of water. Troughs were arranged on the decking. We collected wooden roots and old bleached branches for terracing - a whole trailer load. Susan Band sold a goodly number of alpines and donated part of the revenue to the club. This covered our costs. Without her generosity we would not have persisted for the next decade!

### **Raised Beds**

By 1999 our 36 square metres had metamorphosed into a stand 4 m x 9 m - long and narrow! The RHS was testing our ingenuity. It was during the 1998 and 1999 shows that we started to use raised beds as the main focus. These were built at Pitcairngreen at Susan Band's nursery, where she kindly lent us space for two months before the show and let us use plants from her nursery. The Bands, Bainbridges and Levens spent many afternoons and evenings changing white polystyrene salmon boxes into raised walls. Plants were made to seem bigger than they were by planting the same variety in contiguous boxes. When gravelled up, the tops of the boxes merged into one bed. Similar planting was used where

boxes stepped down to a lower layer to simulate a mature plant seeding down to a lower level. Shrubs and dwarf conifers were important. Susan had a large stock of *Abies balsamea* 'Hudsonia' from which we chose several for prominent positions. All the boxes were numbered and Ian Bainbridge devised a code worthy of Bletchley Park for this task.

To give height we bought a tall, purple-leaved *Acer*. We used this tree in nearly every other display that followed. Jean Band had a knack for planting in the joints between boxes and into awkward spaces. All the trouble was worth it because we won a second gold medal; only a card this time as each exhibitor only gets one real medal. We decided that SRGC members should be visible to the general public so we introduced the bright yellow sweat shirts and polo shirts. We knew who we were and so did the public.

### Best Exhibit

The 12 x 4 narrow site of 1999 forced us into another innovation: triangles. Glassford built triangular raised beds for opposite corners of the display and two parallel walls ran diagonally across the centre. We had a high planted corner with our mixture of herbaceous plants and a patio in corner four. Most of the flowers came from Jean & Susan Band and from Graham Butler. Again we had troughs on the patio. The wooden triangles were painted in translucent magenta wood varnish that complemented the lilacs of orchids, blues of *Meconopsis*, silver of *Celmisia* and greens and browns of *Arisaema*. One triangular bed was planted mainly with New Zealand plants and the other with woodland plants. We even had a pink *Celmisia* that intrigued Peter Erskine. A display in triangles results in many hidden areas that you only discover as you walk around. Between and beside the parallel beds we had paths of bark and sandstone slabs. Our efforts were rewarded by a third gold medal and the RHS Farrer trophy for the best exhibit of alpiners at any RHS show in that year. Jean Broome, Hazel Smith and Betty Hamilton travelled to London to see Sandy receive the trophy from the president of the RHS.

### The Caley

Sadly, the RHS decided to abandon Scotland. This left a gap in the Scottish horticultural calendar and in people's expectations for 2000, the Millennium Year. The Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society filled the gap with *Gardening Scotland* at the Royal Highland show ground, Ingliston, on the western edge of Edinburgh. In this they were supported by Rural Projects, Scotland. Now that it has proven successful it is tempting to take the show for granted but when the Caley took the decision it could not have been an easy one. Fred Last and Tom Mabbot were the driving forces in turning their plan into successful reality. For the first few years the SRGC was given superb sites in the middle of a moderately sized marquee. The first *Gardening Scotland* display in 2000 was a wider version of our Farrer trophy design, winning yet another gold medal and Best Floral Exhibit!

## Royalty

When we took the prize for Best Floral Exhibit for the second time in 2001, Princess Anne came to visit us. Jim Jermyn, the show manager, came round to explain the proper etiquette. She arrived at our stand at about 4 o'clock when the show was becoming quieter and already knew a lot about the rock plants and the SRGC. Referring to our triumph, the Princess Royal asked "Best in Show, two years running, what are the odds of that?"

2002 brought further success but we had a different design, a 'New England' look. Glassford built four interconnecting large rectangular wooden raised beds whose dimensions were based on salmon boxes 800 mm x 400 mm. For two sides of the site he built wooden raised walls into which we placed our planted fish boxes. The blue decking was used again. The last corner had a woodpile with ferns and woodland plants. We tried to make things interesting for children by hiding wee straw rabbits and hedgehogs in corners. The judges said they didn't like these; the children disagreed. Troughs were placed in strategic positions on the decking. By now all the troughs we used were made, painted and planted by Sandy & Anne in Dunblane to make it easier during the run up to the show.

## Floral Hall

These marquee sites suited us perfectly. There was a unique quality about the sunlight as it filtered into the tent, the plants were sheltered from strong winds and people could rest as they made their way round

2011 - Building the joint stand - running up to the show deadline



the show. A big difference came when there was no longer a marquee and we had to stage our exhibit in the Floral Hall. Here there was no grass to soften the site, the light was poor and we were beside jewellery stalls. The whole ambience changed but despite the difficulties our successes continued. Gold medal after gold medal. Over the years we modified our designs. We reused the wooden structures and mixed the New England boxes with magenta triangles. We used the blue decking over and over; one time we painted it black. For some displays we used honey-coloured gravel on the open areas, at other times slate. The troughs were painted to look like slate as well. Once the plants had been laid out they had to be tidied. Dead flowers, broken stems and yellowing leaves had to be removed. Gravel had to be placed under the edges of specimen plants. Carole Bainbridge proved to be untiring and to have nimble fingers as well as enormous patience. She must have removed thousands of bits of detritus from our plants over the years.

### Changing Times

After a decade, the size of the team dwindled and perhaps some of the enthusiasm waned, just as *Gardening Scotland* asked us to stage the large exhibit in front of the Floral Hall. This would have been four times larger than our biggest exhibit. The cost and logistics meant we had to decline. The last display of troughs by the Levens was of more than forty built and planted for a smaller square site in the hall. For some reason we

2012 - *Rus in Urbe* - our first solo effort





resisted pulling out a *Phormium tenax* cultivar from the top trough. The judges disapproved and we had to settle for a silver gilt medal.

The next year we staged a publicity display showing the range of books stocked by the SRGC, several photographs of rock plants, seeds for sale and a PowerPoint presentation on trough making. Even as we entered the new era we continued to use troughs. A constant feature of all the displays was the Scottish Rock Garden Club stone, made and gifted by Henry Taylor. It always has a prime position.

Great friendships were made over a decade of shows. The saddest part of all came when the display had to be dismantled. Many people stayed late on the last day to help dismantle the stand, and our beautiful garden was reduced to bags of gravel and peat as well as crates of plants.

In 2009 Ian Christie set up a display consisting of two large box structures and provided all the plants. He was helped by the Edinburgh group. This was repeated in 2010 and at this point it became clear that participation in *Gardening Scotland* was relying on fewer and fewer members. We needed a change of direction.

### Joint Enterprise

In 2011 the opportunity arose to mount a stand jointly with Kevock Garden whose owners the Rankins are well-known club members. Kevock was exhibiting at Chelsea for the first time and needed help to recreate a display a week later at Ingliston as many of the Chelsea plants would be past their best or sold. SRGC members contributed plants, including many ferns, shrubs and dwarf conifers as well as *Meconopsis*, primulas and others from Ian Christie.

From the club point of view it was useful experience for members who had not been part of the earlier teams. Creating a mini-mountain needs thought. It is not practicable to pile up tons of rock and soil; a frame must be built and stone added in the form of cladding. As most

2013 - George Anderson's *Beechgrove Garden* interview with Stan da Prato





plants will be in pots these have to be concealed. David Rankin has developed a system of using packing material to fill up spaces and support the pots. This also reduces the need for large amounts of gravel. The joint effort won gold and the Alf Evans award.

### On Our Own

In 2012 we were on our own. Graham set up a framework in his garage. Contributions included plants from notable exhibitors such as Cyril Lafong, Ian Christie again provided several striking *Meconopsis* as well as the smaller perennial form of *M. punicea*. Our relatively small stand was all on one level which meant that some *Meconopsis* were higher than our rock ridge! We found we had to use excessive moss to cover some pots. Labels were made up in great haste as we ran out of time. These points led to a silver gilt medal.



2013 - The rocky hillside section of our stand

### Bigger and Better

In 2013 the overall stand was half as big again with the larger plants on the floor level extension. The overall aim was to show a range of colourful plants from mountain regions around the world; we managed to represent every continent other than Antarctica.

The stand featured six main habitats. The lower area was the floor of a valley with woodland plants such as the bigger *Meconopsis*, *Hosta*, *Epimedium*, candelabra *Primula* and *Trillium*. Some moss, leaf mould and old tree stumps helped the bosky look and contrasted with the rock and gravel on the higher level. Here we adapted the frame from the previous

year. The rocky ridge was used again but at a different angle. As the highest part, it featured wind resistant plants such as a few prostrate shrubs and a variety of cushion plants. To one side was an area of miniature forest with dwarf shrubs and conifers that graded into an alpine meadow including some of the smaller *Meconopsis*, *Primula* and *Campanula*. A north-facing corrie held dwarf ferns and other plants that grow in shade, including some nice gesneriads.

We repeated the dry river bed through the middle of the stand with *Lewisia*, *Raoulia* and some hardy succulents among the gravel. To the other side of the dry bed side we planted a new outcrop of limestone strata with sun lovers such as saxifrages, *Dianthus*, *Erigeron* and poppies.

### Timetable

We built the framework on Sunday, an early start to the week allowing us to prepare and label plants as they arrived on Monday. Tuesday was the main planting day with the remainder on Wednesday. By Thursday we hoped to be doing minor touches before judging at 3 o'clock. In practice this slipped a bit and we were still working on the lower level on the last day. We bought a new labelling machine but still found this very time-consuming. We had more plants than we could use on the stand - which is good but required diplomacy when explaining to a member that it was not possible to accommodate their kind offering.

### Was it all worth it?

Creating a garden on a concrete floor was a great deal of work and, along with other exhibitors, we did wonder when stands with bowls of cut flowers received gold awards. Nevertheless, we were awarded the gold medal – the standard that the SRGC should always aim for. As in 2011 and 2012, we were filmed by television's *The Beechgrove Garden* who in the heart of Ian Christie's plants for the 2009 exhibit



clearly thought the stand looked good. Feedback from the public and club members was very positive; all felt the profile of SRGC was again at an appropriately high level within Scotland's national garden show.

## 2014

In 2014 we intend to use the same framework but to make the lower level bigger. It is the easiest area to plant and the show comes at a time when the large primulas and others are readily available. We must play to our strengths – we do not have the resources of a nursery behind us although we are fortunate to buy in plants at favourable rates from sympathetic nurseries, albeit these are usually quite small. We delight in members who between them can bring in some exceptional plants.

## The Volunteers

It takes a deal of effort, enthusiasm and friendship to present the club at these shows and among many others not explicitly mentioned in our account we thank most cordially:

John Amand (Amand Bulbs), Peggy Anderson, Sheila Anderson, Brightwater Holidays, Sylvia & Garth Broomfield, Anne Bush, Hilary Butler (Rumbling Bridge Nursery), Billy Carruthers (Binny Plants), Anne Chambers, Ann Christie, Julia Corden, Ken Dawson, Helen Donald, Ken East, Alan Elliott, Margaret Ferguson, Alan Gardner, Rob Graham, Janet & Alan Hayes, Kath Hendry, Mike Hicks, Bette Ivey, David Lane, John Lee, Sheila McNulty, Netta Milne, Bob Moore, Janet & Jim Paterson, Anthea & Stuart Pawley, Ian Pryde, Kath Rimmer, Trina Rogerson, Lesley Scott, David & Carol Shaw, Sue Simpson & George Watt, Ann & Ian Steele, Sam Sutherland, Jackie Thomlinson, David Walkinshaw, Alison Ward and Maureen Wilson.

"Was it all worth it?" ... Elspeth MacIntosh and Liz Mills in 2009



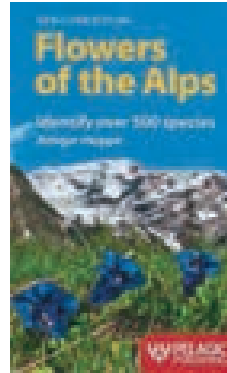
## A Field Guide to the Flowers of the Alps

Ansgar Hoppe

More than 500 colour photos

ISBN 978-1-907807-40-4

Pelagic Publishing, about £18



This is a genuine pocket guide that fits easily into an anorak or cargo pocket; it has less than half the weight and bulk of my 1995 edition of the Collins Pocket Guide to Alpine Flowers. The colour photographs (considering the size of the book) are generally excellent – although it can be difficult to see the plant leaves. Unfortunately, to achieve good photographs, the book has been printed on glossy paper which (“as any fule kno”) sticks together when damp. Do you have any pockets guaranteed to be 100% waterproof in all mountain weather?

My heart sinks when I pick up an otherwise excellent flora and find it arranged by flower colour, as this one is. Flower colour is such a subjective matter, affected to a great extent by the weather. Besides which, species vary in colour and often appear in different colour forms. A small example of the problem is that species of both *Primula* and *Gentianella* genera occur in both the “red” and the “blue” sections. It is possible that this arrangement by colour may help absolute beginners but, even as one who has never studied any botany, I have my doubts. I find it much easier to have all the primulas together, all the campanulas, and so forth. And what is the beginner to make of divisions within each colour section such as three petals, four petals, five petals, many petals (so far, so good) ... zygomorphic flowers? That had me running for my dictionary (leaving me little wiser, with the definition “capable of being cut in only one plane so that the two halves are mirror images”).

I do not favour giving absolutely every species an English name; they should only be given when they are in common use. I was surprised that this is also done in the Collins guide but somehow it seems less obtrusive there. If I were to call to you “Come and see this Splendid Primrose!” what would you expect? Devotees of this book who had discovered a way of differentiating the pronunciation of capital letters and italics would anticipate *Primula spectabilis*, but otherwise you would not. I regret that the Latin names were not given more prominence along with the common Latin synonyms by which most of us may still know them despite the efforts of the taxonomists who are presently rampaging through the orchids and other families.

The book is quite helpful in indicating what you are likely to meet in each area of the Alps, although marred by occasional inaccuracy. For example, it is categorical that *Campanula cenisia* does not grow in an area where we have seen it twice. It would be easier to work out where you are if the map at the back of the book showed national boundaries.

Is it too small? Any pocket flora must be selective. But here there are no crocus and the numbers of species of gentians and primulas are small (no *Gentiana terglouensis*, no *Primula latifolia*, no *Primula tyrolensis*, for example). If you come across anything very rare, you won't know it is a rarity because it won't be in the book! I still prefer the Collins guide, in spite of its greater bulk and its own shortcomings. And finally - a plaintive note: I had hoped that by adding this book to my usual equipment for Helvetian expeditions, the Collins Pocket Guide and the Flora Helvetica, I might finally be able to tell the difference between *Gentiana acaulis* and *Gentiana clusii* - but no; I am still as confused as ever.

*Michael Almond*

### **Daffodil**

**The Remarkable Story of the World's Most Popular Spring Flower**

Noel Kingsbury with 223 colour photographs by Jo Whitworth

220 pages & 223 colour photos

ISBN13 9781604693188

Timber Press £17.99



Failing a monograph on the genus *Narcissus*, any new book on the subject is always welcome; this one from Noel Kingsbury and Jo Whitworth covers a lot of ground for such a slim volume, from legends to cultivation tips.

Beginning with a look at daffodils in human culture, it goes on to outline their botany and horticultural classification. The description of the divisions aims at exhibitors in formal daffodil shows, rather than at alpine exhibitors, so the opinions on 'desirable' features are rather biased - the ravishingly graceful old variety 'Feu de Joie' is described as untidy, whereas the (to my eyes) stiff and dumpy modern equivalent is deemed elegant.

There are interesting sections on the history of cultivation, breeding and commerce, with a focus on cut-flower production in the United Kingdom. They are followed by a section on modern daffodil breeders, all of whom are American except for one Briton, Ron Scamp. The last section on cultivation in the garden is concise but nevertheless very useful, followed by lists of varieties for different situations.

Unfortunately, this book became almost unreadable for me because of the peculiarities of the way the otherwise excellent photographs are treated. Placing is haphazard, picture size varies untidily and the numbering order is seemingly random so that, for instance, pictures 1 to 9 are on one page spread, except for number 2 which appears on the following spread. It can be nightmarish to work out which caption numbers refer to which cultivar name and to which photograph. The picture numbers themselves are tiny, in one instance being found on the

narrow sliver of photograph overlapped onto the adjoining page so that one almost needs to break the spine to see it. In addition, too many pages are not numbered, and the double column layout means that many words are hyphenated, even within sub-heading titles. Together, these layout features detract from an otherwise very interesting book.

*Anne Wright*

### **Peter Korn's Garden**

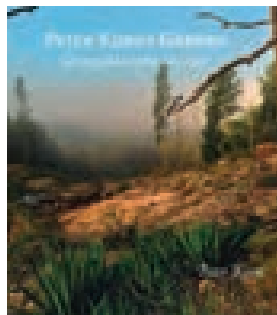
**- Giving plants what they want**

**Peter Korn**

**368 pages 540 colour pictures**

**ISBN 978-91-637-0463-5**

**kornsgarden@gmail.com, about £40**



**H**aving seen the original Swedish language book, with its lavish photographs of plants and habitats from around the world, this English version was eagerly anticipated and does not disappoint. It is a thought-provoking book, arranged in sections covering both Peter's techniques and his thinking behind the materials and methodology he uses in his different approaches to growing.

In the first section, we are led through Peter's environmental philosophy to growing and the way he is inspired by Nature to create environments to grow more specialized alpine plants. His assumption that there aren't any plants hard to grow, only environments hard to recreate, is obvious as he describes the conditions found in Nature. The second section covers the construction of sand beds, their potential and the different conditions they can provide. It is followed by descriptions of selected beds in his current garden with examples of the reasons for growing particular types of plants in them.

A section on microclimates and environments provides beautifully photographed details of more particular habitats such as the crevice and steppe in the wild and goes on to explain how to create these conditions in the garden. The penultimate section covers seed propagation in pots and in the open ground. The final section of this unusual book reiterates the need to think about what a plant wants and to research the necessary growing conditions before deciding where to put it in the garden.

Throughout the book, Peter Korn emphasizes what each plant needs in terms of environmental conditions for its well-grown survival. This splendidly illustrated book shows how he creates a range of different growing environments that take account of the natural soil and weather conditions in his garden. Not everyone will be able to create sand beds on the ambitious scales shown here but there are many ideas worthy of consideration by those wishing to grow alpiners in the open garden.

This remarkable book will delight those who want wonderful photographs of plant habitats around the world, will intrigue those who want to think about the ecology of the plants they want to grow, and will instruct those who desire and long to grow special alpinines in their own gardens.

*Carole Bainbridge*

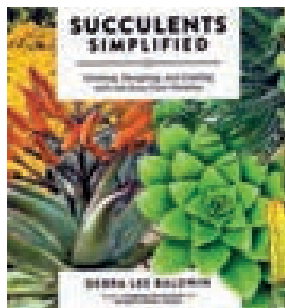
### Succulents Simplified (Growing, Designing, and Crafting with 1000 Easy-Care Varieties)

Debra Lee Baldwin

334 colour photos

ISBN-13: 9781604693935

Timber Press, about £17



This highly colourful 272 page book, to misquote a well-known advertisement, "does exactly what it says on the label". One cannot help but be charmed by the plethora of resplendent designs that are portrayed here. The contrasting forms and colours of succulents will enthuse beginners and all those not yet fascinated by their diversity.

There are a few drawbacks that stem perhaps from an American focus. European growers already interested in succulents may find the book frustrating. Debra purports to prefer Latin names but, for many of the most desirable and colourful plants depicted, leaves some un-named - like *Phedimus spurius*, the coppery-orange *Sedum adolphii*, or the shade loving *Crassula multicava*. It will be even more vexing for European readers who might attempt to source (for example) "Firestick Euphorbias", "Sunset Jade" or "Paddle Plant". Rather like most United States nurseries, Debra misidentifies the English Stonecrop *Sedum anglicum*, depicting *S. album* instead (indeed, twice).

There are three kinds of succulents: leaf succulents, stem succulents (like cacti) and caudiciform plants. In recent years there has been a huge growth in the number of collectors favouring the last form - those producing a caudex. I think Debra's biggest mistake is only to depict two of these (*Fockea edulis* and *Kedrostis africana*) and not to name them or even indicate to which families each belongs.

Nevertheless, having been negative in a number of respects, I can recommend this book as the kind of informative coffee-table production that cannot help but attract admiring eyes. To potential buyers I would say that, although Debra lives in a part of California where temperatures fall below freezing, in the damp western-temperate climes of the United Kingdom most of the plants she discusses will need a dry, frost-free winter if they are to thrive.

*Ray Stephenson*





# A Plantsman's Paradise Revisited

## Gordon Rae

“You should come with us on a trip from Chengdu to Lhasa next June”, suggested Kit Grey-Wilson at the end of 2010. At once I was already half-packed, but I had to convince my wife that she would be fine at the higher altitudes of the alpine passes along the way. After a bout of “What if?”, she decided to go and we signed up to accompany David Haselgrove, Roger & Christine Skelmersdale, John Richards, Vicki Matthews, our leader Harry Jans, his eagle-eyed plant-spotting wife Hannie, and others – fifteen in all – plus our drivers and two excellent Chinese ground agents, Carolyn and Rena. The itinerary did not turn out as originally intended: the Chinese authorities once again closed the road through Tibet to foreigners, and Kit was forced to pull out shortly before we were due to leave.

Harry Jans and Kit struggled for several weeks via their contacts to devise a new route that would allow unimpeded travel to places of botanical interest in Sichuan and Yunnan. The final route was Chengdu to Ya’an, then west to Kangding. Thence we would continue west and then south to Jiulong. We planned to return to Chengdu then to fly into Yunnan to spend several days botanizing around Zhongdian and in the areas around Hongshan, Wengshui and the Da Xue Shan Pass before returning to Chengdu for the journey home. Looking back, it was another memorable and well-organized trip to China, with good weather and good company. Harry, of course, is a dedicated alpine lover. As one fellow traveller remarked: “If it is more than six inches tall, Harry isn’t interested!”

A disproportionately large fraction of the world’s flora can be found in Sichuan and Yunnan. On an earlier visit in 2009 (*The Rock Garden* 125) we

Above: *Soroseria glomerata* on scree

had found enough plants for both the 'herbaceous' and 'woody' men in Sichuan. On another trip to the Salween Valley in Yunnan in 2010, the woody men were in their element but this year, 2011, the herbaceous and alpine lovers were to have it all their own way. As usual, some of us had a wish list of the plants to see. Mine was short: just a trio of *Saussurea*, *Rheum nobile* and *Nomocharis aperta*. Eventually, we saw all three, although the *Nomocharis* eluded us until our last day of botanizing on the return from Wengshui to Zhongdian.

The whole group met for the first time in Chengdu and, after a welcome lunch, immediately drove to Ya'an straight down the highway in less than two hours, passing endless construction sites, heavily laden trucks, cars, motor cycles, bikes and pedalled trailers. We crossed the Red Plain on which rice, vegetables, maize, citrus, cucurbits and lotus are cultivated and passed ponds, presumably for rearing fish. From the moment you land in this vast country with its population of 1.4 billion people the buzz and vibrancy quickly penetrate your skin and pass into your blood. As they say, TIC – "This is China". Of the seventy or so countries I have been in during the past half century, China is indisputably the most interesting and fascinating, historically, geographically, ethnically, culturally and - of course - botanically. At the end of this day, most people retired to the comfort of their hotel rooms in Ya'an after a long journey and an early dinner.

The monument to the 'Brick Tea Carriers' outside Kangding



## Ya'an to Kangding

Although not to everyone's choice, next morning started with a visit to the Bifengxia Panda Reserve outside Ya'an. These black and white overgrown teddy bears are delightful either as adults, munching their favourite bamboo, or as gambolling, play-fighting youngsters in groups of twos or threes. Just outside Ya'an on the road to Kangding is the monument to the "Brick Tea Carriers", who carried as much as 130 kg of tea, squashed into bricks, on their backs across the mountains into Tibet. Men, women and children carried various loads to suit their size, age and gender. E H Wilson photographed them in 1908 and one of the statues is modelled on his photographs. It is impossible to imagine the hardship these poor souls endured on their backbreaking journeys. Beyond Luding the tarmac ceased and the road was bad where a new one is being built, along with yet another new power station on the Dadu River. Below us, backed up behind this new dam, is a fresh lake, drowning the old roads and surrounding lands in its murky brown, heavily silt-laden river water.

Despite this construction there were plenty of plants to enjoy: *Arisaema*, *Rhododendron decorum*, roses, *Tsuga*, *Schefflera*, *Hypericum* and *Zanthoxylum bungeanum*, the Sichuan Pepper Tree. Alongside the road, fresh fruits such as peaches, cherries and bananas were on sale. Owing to the usual delays caused by poor road conditions, traffic jams and minor accidents, the journey from Ya'an to Kangding took us seven rather than five hours.

## Kangding to the Airport ... and Back

Next day was to be our first of serious botanizing. Our planned route led north of Kangding through Yala and Wangmu, past the new airport and with a circular return to Kangding. But "The best laid plans ..."! The old road on the east of the river had been replaced by a new tarmac road on the west leading to the tourist spot of Mugecuo Lake. All went well until we met the first landslide of any consequence. By laying rocks and stones and carefully following the mud track by the road our driver managed to get the coach through while we walked alongside. The road climbed steeply, passing *Paeonia veitchii*, *Syringa yunnanensis*. In a damp area of meadow and light scrub we found *Primula cockburniana*, *Podophyllum hexandrum*, *Arisaema ciliatum* and *A. elephas* with unidentified gentians, *Smilacina*, *Cephalanthera longifolia* and several unidentified *Pedicularis*. When we stopped at 3600 m some of the group were feeling the altitude but put up with the headache when surrounded by *Cypripedium tibeticum*, *Acanthocalyx (Morina) nepalensis*, androsaces, irises, *Rhododendron primuliiflorum*, *Rheum alexandrae*, *Meconopsis integrifolia* and *M. henrici*, *Fritillaria cirrhosa* and *Lloydia* lilies. We reached the pass at 4400 m and on such a fine day had good views towards Gongga Shan, Yala Peak and west across the grasslands towards Tagong.



*Primula cockburniana*

As we descended the pass a minor disaster struck. Just past the new(ish) airport, which seemed just as deserted today as it did two years previously, two huge concrete blocks, each weighing several tons, had been placed across the road, stopping our onward path and leaving no way around for a coach. Nobody knew or had been told that the blocks had been put there – “TIC!”

There was no alternative but to turn and retrace our steps over the pass. The driver somehow turned the coach around on little more than a sixpence. Several people were pleased to be back in Kangding, having suffered the effects of altitude sickness after climbing to 4400 metres so early in the trip.

### **Kangding to the Grey Lake (Huai Hai Xi)**

The following day was a planned visit south of Kangding to Huai Hai Xi (the Grey Lake), which we had visited in 2009. The road, much better now it is finished, passes through areas of newly-built apartment blocks of New Kangding, where much construction still continues, having destroyed huge areas of irises and primulas that we saw two years previously. We climbed through the mountains to 3830 m, then left the coaches on the tarmac by a monument and walked on to an unmade track to the Grey Lake. The area both around and in the lake is rich in primulas, such as *Primula amethystina*, *P. sikkimensis*, *P. secundiflora*, *P. szechuanica* and *P. florida*, along with *Meconopsis integrifolia*, *Pedicularis* and *Fritillaria cirrhosa*. Some of us walked around the lake, picking our way across bog and small streams, finding *Daphne retusa*, *Leontopodium stracheyi*, *Lonicera*, *Rhododendron impeditum*, *Anemone* and, *en route*, the orchid, *Ponerorchis chusua*.

After a picnic lunch we followed the fence line until it disappeared into the lake and then climbed over a knoll, stopping to rest, breathless at about 4100 m. Soon after that I reached for my camera to take a

Yala Mountain from the airport road, Kangding, Sichuan



photograph and realized that ... I had left my camera behind around our lunch stop. Devastated and very embarrassed, I had no idea where I had left it. Harry took it all in his stride. "We will both go back and we will find it" he pronounced confidently. We did and he did; I could not believe my luck. When I re-joined the group, which had waited patiently for our return, and feeling very humiliated, I was presented with a lucky horseshoe the others had found in the grass while we were on the camera hunt! On the way down we stopped at a hole in the fence we had been through in 2009 into an area of boggy land that now yielded some new finds: *Pinguicula alpina*, *Cassiope selaginoides*, *Caltha palustris* and *C. scaposa* with *Trollius* and *Androsace*. John Richards got quite excited at finding *Primula handeliiana* on the opposite roadside bank.

### On the Zheduo Pass

In 2009 we had had no time to explore the Zheduo Pass (4296 m) but this year we had a full day. We stopped *en route* at about 4150 m where we found the quite stunning deep purple to black *Primula melanantha*. On the surrounding banks and tracks were *Corydalis*, *Meconopsis henrici* and annual gentians in colours from near white to royal blue. The car park at the pass has been enlarged but the re-alignment of the road below the pass has left some nasty scars on the landscape. The steps above the stupa are quite challenging for the over-seventies at that altitude but there is a rewarding range of plants in the exposed grassland and rocky patches, including cream, purple-billed *Pedicularis variegata*, *Meconopsis henrici*,

*Primula melanantha*



*Anaphalis nepalensis*, *Rhodiola fastigiata*, *Androsace* and *Oxygraphis polypetala*. Returning from the pass to Kangding we stopped and found *Primula stenocalyx*, *Gentiana nubigena*, *Primula fasciculata*, *Clematis montana* and *Rhododendron souliei*.

### Kangding to Jiulong

The next leg of the Sichuan journey led westward from Kangding along the Sichuan-Tibet Highway and south to Jiulong. We passed some very substantial and richly decorated stone Tibetan houses in pasture land, where grew stands of white and yellow *Stellera*, asters and *Androsace spinulifera*. A great range of plants may be seen from the road in this valley - conifers, *Lonicera*, *Deutzia*, *Rodgersia*, *Incarvillea*, *Pteris* and other ferns. Somewhat later we passed lines of brightly coloured tents and decided to investigate. We had happened on set-up day for a Tibetan 'Ascot' meeting - a five day festival of horse racing! We were invited in by the friendly Tibetans, who were as amused and pleased to see us as we were them. They were delightful and allowed us to take our many photographs, which they enjoyed looking at in the cameras.

From that valley we climbed steeply towards the high pass (4602 m), stopping to admire *Primula muscarioides*, *Cypripedium tibeticum*, *Primula cockburniana* and a hillside of yellow and purple rhododendrons. Above the tree line we spotted *Lilium lophophorum* for the first time.

On the south side of the pass we encountered very heavy rain and then, not surprisingly, a landslide of mud, slate and water, which halted our progress. Within seconds Carolyn had contacted the police by phone and was told that a bulldozer would be sent to clear the landslide. It took two hours to reach us, having cleared three more landslides lower down the road. We finally reached our destination, Jiulong, after nine, very pleased to be in our hotel, which displayed a large welcoming notice in the foyer 'Authorised for Foreigners'. In the bathroom was another notice, which read 'Slip Carefully!'

### Below the Jiulong Pass

The following day we made our way back in stages north to the pass, passing through different vegetative zones. In the valley bottoms in marshy ground close to the river were carpets of *Primula sikkimensis* and *Primula poissonii*, blue *Corallodiscus flabellatus*, the yellow bell-shaped flowers of *Clematis pogonandra*, *Deutzia*, various arisaemas and *Pedicularis*. At higher altitudes, *Primula fernaldiana*, *Thalictrum* and *Caragana* were in flower. At 3700 m we encountered *Lilium lophophorum* ssp. *linearifolium*, *Smilacina henryi*, *Anemone*, *Iris* and *Semiaquilegia ecalcarata*. At each stop the plant list lengthened to include *Stellera chamaejasme*, the golden yellow form var. *chrysantha*, *Podophyllum*

Facing: *Cypripedium tibeticum* 







*Cyripedium guttatum*

*hexandrum* and *Incarvillea mairei*. As a rapidly darkening sky threatened more heavy downpours, it was agreed to return to Jiulong before we were caught again along the way by more landslides. We did, however, find time to stop to photograph the beautiful electric-blue *Corydalis pachycentra* growing along the roadside.

#### Wu Xu Hai

North-west of Jiulong, a lake called Wu Xu Hai is invitingly marked on the map. Harry's agreement to go there was a good one and gave us one of our best days. The road led through a steep-sided valley of pine forest, its trees heavily hung with lichen, *Usnea*. We stopped along the way to explore various wooded glades. These were indeed a true 'Plantsman's Paradise', with *Roscoea tibetica*, *Iris chrysographes*, several arisaemas and then - in one small area - *Cyripedium tibeticum*, *Cyripedium flavum*



*Cypripedium flavum*

and *Cypripedium guttatum*, all growing more or less side by side with *Calanthe delavayi* and *Oreorchis nana* close by. We walked along the east side of the lake through the woods checking the many primulas, violas and established clumps of *Arisaema elephas*, some with ten or more flowers in perfect condition.

The view from the northern end of Wu Xu Hai across the water to the mountains was stunning. At this point Roger Skelmersdale asked if I would like “a little adventure?” – I agreed. Instead of returning along the same path we would circumnavigate the lake and return along the western shore. Crossing the bog and streams leading into the lake got us to the western side and the thick woodland but unfortunately there was no path and we had to follow nothing but yak tracks, clambering over fallen trees to return to our starting point. It took us all of the two hours we had available and we didn’t stop much to look at plants or take photographs.

Of course, the small streams that enter the lake at the northern end issue as a rather wide river at the southern end. Our only crossing was on some rocks and a dam of rotting fallen tree trunks. We managed – just. When asked by others if we had enjoyed it, Roger replied “It is not a walk I would do by choice a second time!”

### Jiulong to Kangding

Owing to the roads further west being closed by the Chinese authorities, we had no choice but to retrace our route from Jiulong to Kangding and then Kangding to Chengdu. That said, there was plenty to see towards Kangding, breath-taking scenery and a wide range of plants. On the pass north of Jiulong we found saxifrage species, Edelweiss, *Meconopsis* and a *Taraxacum* that John Richards, our expert, described as “a very classy dandelion”. After dinner we walked across to the market in Kangding, still buzzing with activity at 9 o’clock at night. Although primarily a vegetable market, some stalls sold Chinese medicines, which included every type of fungus imaginable, small sackfuls of tiny bulbs of *Fritillaria cirrhosa*, dried *Saussurea* plants, but nothing as upsetting as a box of small paws from some poor unidentified animal.

### Kangding to Chengdu

The road journey from Kangding to Chengdu was, as expected, erratic and very dusty with stops and starts for traffic jams and long delays where the road was being re-constructed. We stopped at Luding especially to see the famous chain bridge across the Dadu River. Unfortunately the bridge no longer exists; it has disappeared except for the two anchor towers on either side of the river. It took us eleven hours for the journey, a gruelling day for our driver. We passed a few isolated stands of *Lilium*

At the market



*sargentiae* growing more or less horizontally from the cliff faces, but could not stop to enjoy them.

### Chengdu to Zhongdian, Yunnan

Our guide had found us a direct flight from Chengdu to Zhongdian but it required us to get up at 4:30 a.m. However, we reached our hotel before they stopped serving breakfast and I tucked in to a bowl of excellent hot and spicy noodles - a dish not popular with many of our group, at least not for breakfast. We were entertained during the morning by the comings and goings of a Tibetan wedding at our hotel. The women were in colourful dresses and some men were resplendent in costumes of leopard skins and busby-like fur hats. We were treated as guests outside the hotel, being offered cakes and cigarettes, but we never did see the bride. The market in Zhongdian is to be recommended, with vegetables, meat, fruits, spices, pyramids of fresh yak cheeses, hardware stalls and small shops, peopled by colourful stall holders and customers alike, dressed in national costume. That day our lunch consisted of delicious ripe mangoes and a bunch of fresh lychees. We passed the afternoon in the reconstructed old town of Zhongdian, an interesting place through which to wander looking at shops, stopping in the market place or drinking a beer in one of the bars in the side streets.

### On the Shika Xue Shan

Our good fortune with the weather held when the next day we took the cable car outside Zhongdian from 3200 m in two stages to 4500 m and on to the Shika Xue Shan, an ascent of over 1450 metres. Under the canopy below us we could pick out yellow *Cypripedium flavum*, pink *Syringa yunnanensis*, white *Clematis montana*, roses and blue irises

Rotten trees, rotten path



amongst stands of larch, *Abies* and birches, but this was nothing to the range of alpine plants that awaited us around the summit. There were *Meconopsis*, primulas, orchids, *Saussurea medusa*, *Corydalis*, *Lloydia* lilies, and *Diapensia* amongst many others. We left as it started to rain heavily, turning into torrential rain by bedtime.

The Shika Xue Shan warranted more than one visit and we returned for a second day, going to the summit by cable car, then walking down to the first cable car station. In perfect weather for walking and taking photographs, we descended through open grassland, explored the scree slope and passed through the woodland to emerge finally on a hard track to the middle cable station. The plant list, daily compiled as a group with Harry each evening after dinner, continued to swell. On that day it included *Saussurea medusa*



new genera and species including *Anemone coelestina*, *Salvia*, *Primula polyneura*, *Ligularia*, the prostrate *Euphorbia stracheyi*, *Meconopsis pseudointegrifolia*, the yellow *Oreorchis foliosa*, parasitic *Boschniakia himalaica*, *Erysimum*, *Lancea tibetica* and *Rhododendron wardii*, still in flower.

### Zhongdian to Hongshan

Harry said that after so many botanical treats he would keep the best until last and so it was with high hopes that we left half our luggage behind and packed “just enough essential parts” to transfer to a fleet of 4x4 vehicles for the last six or seven days north of Zhongdian in Hongshan and on to Wengshui to explore the Da Xue Shan pass (4327 m) and surrounding mountains, screes, valleys and gorges.

*Arenaria polytrichoides*







*Corydalis benecincta*

The road north out of Zhongdian is tarmac and our convoy was soon climbing into coniferous forest, having passed some large stone, finely decorated, three-storey Tibetan houses with substantial outer gardens and courtyards. Of the three storeys, the ground floor is traditionally for animals, the first floor is living accommodation and the top floor is storage. The road to Hongshan leaves the main road and is unmade, bumpy, potholed and dusty but is the only route for all transport through this area. We soon had a breakdown and one of the 'Pajeros' had to be abandoned. We redistributed luggage, food and passengers amongst the five remaining vehicles. A little later a second vehicle broke down but luckily was re-started, using some of our precious supply of bottled water to cool the engine.

During the morning's stop we found pink *Primula boreio-calliantha*, *Cremanthodium reniforme* and *Chrysosplenium* species. On the scree were several species of *Androsace*, *Arenaria*, *Diapensia purpurea*, yellow *Cremanthodium decaisnei* and purple *C. campanulatum*, the first of my wish list, *Saussurea medusa*, and the pale brown *Sorooseris rosularis*, almost perfectly camouflaged against the grey brown scree and looking so unreal it could have been an alien plant from another planet. After going through yet another 4500 m pass and descending towards

Hongshan we stopped to admire impressive carpets of *Primula sikkimensis* and *P. secundiflora*, which the botanists in the group admitted were the best they had ever seen.

Having been warned that the accommodation at the yak cheese farm at Hongshan would be basic we were astounded to find an idyllic, new, two-storey, pine-built chalet with eight double rooms and all the mod cons one needed, right next to a crystal clear babbling river alongside woodland, and now known as the Mei Xiang Mountain Lodge (<http://bridgefund.org/business-in-paradise-mei-xiang-eco-lodge/>). Harry was mightily relieved and everyone else was mightily impressed.

### Around Hongshan

Another fine day dawned. After breakfast we retraced our way to the pass and walked down across the scree, logging pink *Pedicularis siphonantha*, the striking *Corydalis pseudohamata* with its yellow flowers and dark blue tips, *Lamiophlomis rotata*, pink *Allium prattii*, *Corydalis benecincta*, one of my favourite alpines with its purplish-brown leaves and pink to blue flowers shading to white. In addition we found *Fritillaria delavayi*, *Rhodiola crenulata*, *Dolomiaea forrestii* and *Fritillaria cirrhosa*, but my plant of the day had to be my first sighting of the largest gentian in the world, *Megacodon stylophorus* with large pale green bell flowers and,

*Lamiophlomis rotata*



close by, the deep purple *Mandragora caulescens*. Later that afternoon we drove up to a small lake above Hongshan called Wu Di Hu in the Leng Du area, set in magnificent mountain scenery. This lake supports *Rheum alexandrae*, *Triosteum himalayanum*, various *Primula* and *Lamium* around its edge and perhaps a *Batrachium* growing in it. Our early return to our cabins left time to go into the heavy woodland across the river opposite *Cremanthodium campanulatum*



our rooms. It was here, well into the woods, that I found what I thought was yet another *Primula*. After dinner I returned with John Richards who confirmed with some delight that it was *Primula septemfida* (see [www.jansalpines.com/gallery/main.php?g2\\_itemId=29988](http://www.jansalpines.com/gallery/main.php?g2_itemId=29988)), bringing his total of primulas found so far to thirty one.

*Meconopsis lancifolia*



## Hongshan to Wengshui

The group seemed loth to leave the comfort of our pine cabins in Hongshan but we had four more nights to go at the more isolated village of Wengshui further north, where it was known that the accommodation really would be more basic. Our first stop at 4680 m was a site rich in *Bergenia*, *Lloydia*, *Androsace* and *Primula boreio-calliantha*. Once over the pass at 4600 m we retraced our unmade road back to the tarmac of the Zhongdian - Wengshui highway where our coach was waiting. We transferred everything from the 4x4 vehicles to the coach and continued north. We stopped at a look-out point above Wengshui to admire the mountain scenery, taking in both Little Snow Mountain and Big Snow Mountain ranges far to the north. We later made a short walk up a steep path to the base of a limestone cliff to find another alpine gem, the brown and white slipper orchid, *Cypripedium plectrochilum*.

Our guest house in Wengshui was, as predicted, more basic but had all required facilities: clean beds, electricity, shared bathroom, running water, sometimes hot, and a loo with a broken seat that flushed with the encouragement of a couple of bowlfuls of tap water poured into the open cistern. All of that and large bottles of beer at thirty pence a bottle

*Cypripedium plectrochilum*



from the little general store next door. What more does the 21st century traveller want or need? If you say food, we had that as well. It was excellent, with a variety of dishes of pork, beef, chicken, fresh vegetables and rice, all well-presented, cooked and hot, thanks to Harry's forethought and our two loyal guides' careful preparation. The Tibetan staff were clearly unused to a coach load of westerners but were pleasant and could not have been more helpful and attentive to our needs.

### The Da Xue Shan Pass – East Side

Our first target area was the east side of the Da Xue Shan (Big Snow Mountains) pass (4327 m) north of Wengshui, passing Tibetan homesteads with surrounding land growing wheat, barley, potatoes, maize and patches of oil seed rape. Along the road were several small sawmills to handle timber logged from the surrounding mountain sides and used in the building of the large Tibetan houses. It took a full hour and a half to drive the hairpin-riddled mountain road to the pass. We planned to walk up the east side, with a small group accompanying Harry further up the mountainside. We climbed a long ridge passing *Cremanthodium*, *Allium*, *Rhodiola*, *Pedicularis*, *Polygonatum* and *Potentilla*. Higher up were *Meconopsis*, *Arenaria*, *Saussurea*, *Sorozeris*, *Fritillaria*, *Allium*, *Androsace* and *Primula* in abundance. We climbed to about 4600 m and looked down into the valley far below us to see tiny pint-sized creamy yellow flowers dotted across the landscape. Yes, they were *Rheumobile*, the second of my wish list plants. The choice to return the same way as we had come or to descend the scree to the rheums below was never in doubt. We dropped quickly over the scree to reach these statuesque conical flowers of the palest yellow bracts above a wide base of bright green leaves, standing solitary in the harsh mountain landscapes. I had waited many years since first seeing pictures of these alpine beauties and I have to admit to shedding a tear as I stood alongside them for the first time with Hanni and Harry sharing my uncontrollable joy.

Below the rheums we found *Sorozeris hirsuta* in flower and an area carpeted in yellow *Primula sikkimensis* with deep pink *P. secundiflora*: the end to a perfect day's botanizing on the Da Xue Shan.

*Rheumobile*





*Paraquilegia microphylla*  
*Sorozeris* cf. *gillii* in bud







*Meconopsis lancifolia*

#### The Da Xue Shan Pass – West Side

We returned for a second day on the mountain with the aim of reaching the limestone screes but climbed too high by lunchtime and were forced to lose height before it was safe enough to descend the screes to the valley beneath the limestone cliffs. We soon started to find *Saussurea*, *Soroseris*, *Androsace* and *Pleurospermum* and then continued to a col to find *Paraquilegia microphylla* and a bright yellow *Potentilla* clinging to the vertical sides of the limestone cliffs. As time was getting on and the weather changeable we headed back. Another good day.





Facing: *Nomocharis aperta* 🇨🇦

*Saxifraga unguiculata*  
*Corallodiscus kingianus*



## The Birong Gorge

For our last day of plant hunting we made the short foray from Wengshui south to the Birong Gorge. Everyone should do this walk in the morning. The gorge is impressive, narrow with steep-sided, near vertical walls, about 300 metres high. Here was a completely different flora, the gorge being full of woodland plants such as *Gymnocarpium robertianum*, *Roscoea tibetica*, *Paris polyphylla*, *Pyrola decorata*, *Salvia*, *Arisaema*, *Corallodiscus kingianus*, *Tofieldia*, *Epipactis helleborine*, *Calanthe delavayi*, *Goodyera* species and one of the very few lilies that we saw - the yellow *Lilium xanthellum*, which caused the greatest excitement. To round off the day we visited Upper Wengshui village, walked around and went into one of the vast Tibetan stone houses, inhabited by four generations. Although the individual rooms are large, some such as the 'prayer rooms' are decorated as lavishly inside as they are outside, and are filled with intricate woodcarving. With our stay in Wengshui at an end it was time to return to Zhongdian with only the *Nomocharis* of my wish list still unseen. However, on the return journey, *N. aperta* was spotted on a roadside bank, bringing our bus to an abrupt halt with an enthusiastic outpouring of bodies and cameras. Although found at the eleventh hour, this completed my trio of 'must see' plants and ended a memorable plant-hunting trip, thanks to the organisation of Harry Jans, our Chinese guides and the absent Kit Grey-Wilson. That said, Chengdu to Lhasa remains a still unfulfilled ambition ...

David Haselgrove, Hannie Jans, Christine Skelmersdale, Harry Jans and John Richards. The author is behind the lens





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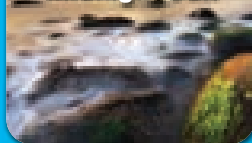
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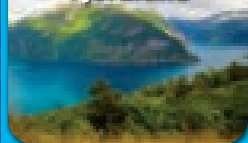
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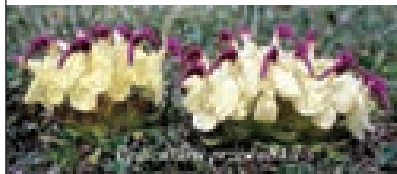
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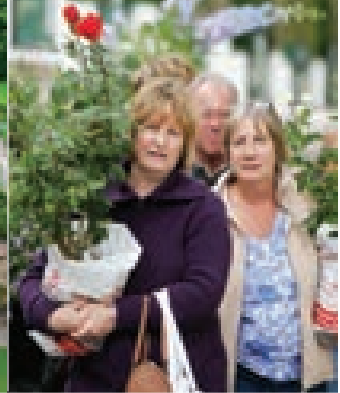


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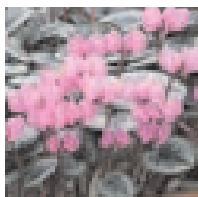


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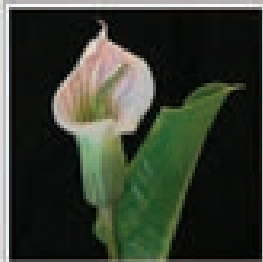
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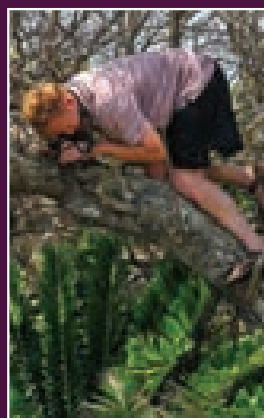


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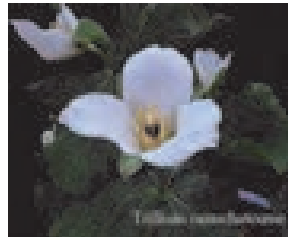
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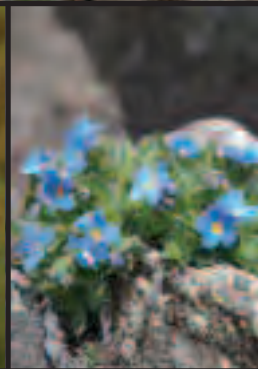
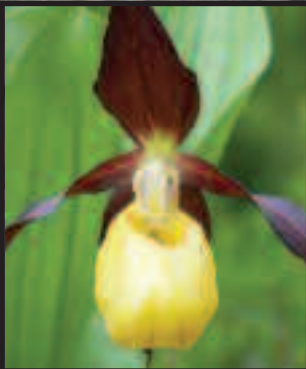




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