

International Rock Gardener



---International Rock Gardener---

March 2011



The SRGC aims to encourage interest and knowledge of rock garden and alpine plants as widely as possible. Our internet presence is invaluable in providing both a meeting place and forum for that very purpose. SRGC is happy to support and promote any of our sister organisations around the world and we are delighted that the IRG is also able to do that in addition to being a point of initial contact for those just finding an enthusiasm for the alpine wildflowers of the world and also giving a "flower hit" to confirmed alpine addicts. The IRG Team is immensely grateful to the generosity of our Contributors and offers a warm welcome to all those finding this community via the pages of IRG and thanks you for your words of praise and appreciation.

Cover picture: *Gentiana acaulis* and *Primula daonensis* by Ferenc Zoltan, see page 12

---Gardens in the mountains---

In IRG14 we visited the Northern Ireland garden of Joan and Liam as they constructed a crevice garden- this month they show us some highlights of a trip to the Tien Shan.

Silk Road Blues by Joan and Liam McCaughey

"Never in the world have I seen such an abundance and variety of wild flowers as I saw today" The words of Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Howard-Bury, from County Offaly, (who later led the 1921 Everest Reconnaissance Expedition) and who in 1913 went on an extended overland expedition to Central Asia. Some eighty years later, his diaries were collated and published in a book entitled "The Mountains of Heaven". Joan read this and his descriptions of the mountains and their flora gave her a longing to visit the Tien Shan or 'Celestial' Mountains.

This was later intensified by a visit to Howard-Bury's ancestral home, Belvedere, on the shores of Lough Ennell, just outside the town of Mullingar – a fascinating place with the unique "Jealous Wall", a gothic folly erected in the 18th Century, as well as a Himalayan garden (sadly now much diminished), as a tribute to Charles Howard Bury. Although, in keeping with that period of time, his main preoccupation was shooting, he shows wide interests, and often enthused about the flora - he continues "At the lower heights white and yellow were the predominating colours on the hillsides, but between eight and ten thousand feet blues and purples seemed to take the place of white." It is these blues that feature in this article.



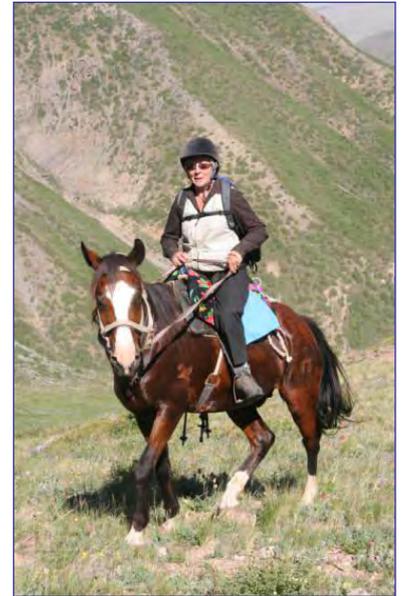
Dracocephalum grandiflorum in habitat

---International Rock Gardener---

So, when AGS Expeditions combined with the Greentours 2008 trip to Tien Shan, we decided to see these before we were too old. The prospectus did worry us with mention of horse-riding (not among our skills) for half an hour on two days, so we had a couple of basic riding classes at home. This was fortunate, as we were actually on horseback for up to five hours on five days!

The Tien Shan are on the borders of China and the former USSR, the "Stans". We were on their northern edge, in Kazakhstan, both in the Ala Tau or Blue Mountains, just south of Almaty, the former capital, and in the Kara Tau, Black mountains, in the Aksu-Dzhabagly reserve 300 km further west. The road between these and going on through Tashkent in Uzbekistan is the route of the northern branch of the old Silk Road which linked China with the West a thousand years ago.

Flying into Almaty from Heathrow, we drove south to Chimbulak, a ski resort some 49km from Almaty and about 1829m up in the mountains. We had three nights there, and were to return to the Area south of Almaty for the last four days of the trip, after visiting the Aksu Dzhabagly reserve 300 km. to the west.



Above left: *Gentiana verna*

Above right: *Dracocephalum grandiflorum*

The slopes were indeed covered with subalpine and alpine flowers. As this area is some 3220km from the nearest sea, the flora is very different to the Alps or Himalayas.

Despite this, on the second day, we found as blue a *Gentiana verna* as could live in the Burren.

However much more typical was massed *Dracocephalum grandiflorum*, no doubt one of the flowers which took Charles Howard-Bury's eye a century ago.

Right: *Trollius (Hegemone) lilacinus*



---International Rock Gardener---

Below: *Polemonium caucasicum* grew along the roadsides.



Golden yellow Trollius is widespread, but Howard-Bury was much taken, as we were, with the Ice Plant – *Trollius (Hegemone) lilacinus*, “whose petals varied in colour from white to the bluey green of ice in a deep crevasse”

[*Anemone protracta*](#), obviously closely related to the Alpine *Anemone narcissiflora*, was one of the other plants dominating the subalpine meadows – but we are concentrating on the blues, so will leave many beautiful plants out.



While it is described as 'just a little crucifer', Joan was very taken with [*Chorispora bungeana*](#), a lilac-blue plant with a lovely delicate scent, often growing among rocks and with a rare ability to withstand freezing temperatures.

Then we travelled 300 km west by first class (but not as you know it) overnight train, to the village of Dzhabagly or more correctly Жабagly. The train was crowded and friendly, and it was interesting to see the platforms lined with locals selling all the necessities for long-distance train travel, from vodka to a wide range of foods.

We stayed in Yevgeny's guesthouse in Dzhabagly, and two days were spent looking at plants and birds on the steppe just north of the mountains, including a nesting short-toed eagle. On the second of these, the final stop was just on the border with Kyrgyzstan, and just north of the reserve, at around 915m.



Veronica spuria

---International Rock Gardener---

The Aksu-Dzhabagly reserve, established over eighty years ago, in 1926, is big (850 km²), high (up to 4200m) and rugged. Most of it is a real reserve, for nature only, and we were only on the southern slopes, where tourists are allowed. Leaving the village, we soon met our horses, and spent the rest of the day “horse-sitting” on our retired army nags to get up to the Mountain House. This was scary enough if you were not a rider and more so when Alain’s horse bolted and he fractured a wrist. He was evacuated, plastered and spent the rest of the time on foot. Here the blue theme was mainly *Veronica spuria*, surprisingly difficult to photograph, like much here, just because there is so much.



Above left: *Delphinium confusum*



Above right: *Aconitum talassicum*

About half way was a patch of a *Delphinium confusum*, tall spikes of a rather restrained blue colour.

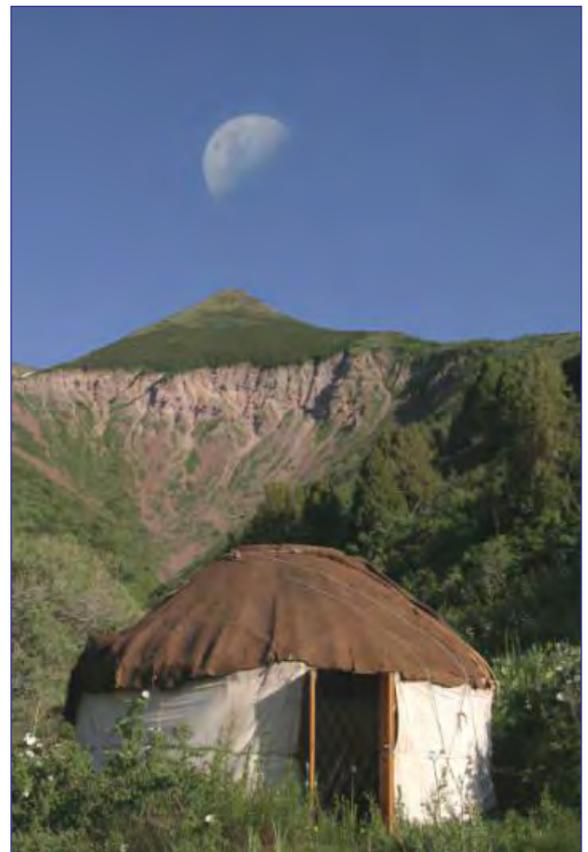
While these grew along with the veronica and other tall plants on the open slopes, where we lunched in a sheltered gorge a bright blue aconite *Aconitum talassicum* was twining through the trees, and contrasted with the only orchid we saw, the deep magenta [*Dactylorhiza umbrosa*](#).

The Mountain house, a wooden construction, is quite comfortable in a basic way but was short on space this time, so two of us (we negotiated a rotation), slept in the rather half-completed yurt pictured here.

Right: Yurt to sleep in.

Next day, Day 7, we walked (no horses!!) up the Vitendasky valley, again from subalpine up to alpine altitude.

The fields of tulips which can be seen earlier in the year have gone by June, but Vladimir aimed to find the last of the *Tulipa greigii* higher up, and there it was, just a few plants in perfect condition, bright red with a trace of yellow at the base.



---International Rock Gardener---

Nearby was a small light blue Juno Iris, *Iris albomarginata* (syn. *I. caerulea*) again in perfect condition on the dry slopes, the only place we saw these.



Left: *Iris albomarginata* (syn. *I. caerulea*)

This valley, too, had an amazing variety of species, but to continue the blue theme were a deep blue *Linum altaicum*, in contrast to pink *Linum olgae*, and campanulas including *Campanula glomerata*.



Above: *Linum altaicum*

Left: *Campanula glomerata*



Right: *Stephanocaryum olgae*

The fauna could be interesting, too. I was bending to photograph a corydalis when Vladimir suddenly made a snatch and picked up a Haly's pit viper (so called



---International Rock Gardener---

because of the heat-sensing pit beside its eye) He said “do you want a picture? – then I’ll cool it”. Five minutes on the snow and it had slowed enough for a close-up!



Left: *Gloydius halys* (Haly's Pit Viper)

Below: Haly's Viper on [Kyrgyz stamp](#)



At this point, I think we should express our thanks to our local guides, Vladimir Kolbintsev a reliable all-rounder with an encyclopaedic knowledge of all aspects, and an excellent organiser, and Anna Ivaschenko who knows all the flowers and is never as happy as when in the place that she regards as her garden, the mountains of the Reserve.

But back to the other blue plant, which we had become almost blasé about, as it seemed to crop up at the end of every day – *Paraquilegia*.

This day our experts deemed this to be *Paraquilegia caespitosa*, though the differences from *P. anemonoides* seem small and could be the subject of endless discussion. But we were to see it again.



Above: *Paraquilegia caespitosa*



Left: *Ixiolirion tataricum*

Also high up, at 3048m (10,000ft) on an exposed ridge on another day, were the brilliant blue trumpets of *Ixiolirion tataricum*.

---International Rock Gardener---



As well as the flora, we were also surrounded by the local fauna.

Brown bears were seen at a distance, as were Lammergaier, Saker Falcon and Egyptian Vultures but butterflies were everywhere, and the picture here is of a Black Veined White on *Gentiana olivieri*, which grew at the edge of the steppe just outside the Reserve.

Left: Aporia crataegi (Black-Veined White Butterfly) on *Gentiana olivieri*

For the last four days we returned to the Ala Tau just south of Almaty, to a most surreal scene.



Gaish is a largely derelict Soviet era astronomical observatory, at 1829m, with disintegrating and abandoned equipment and buildings dominated by a massive radio telescope which tracks the sun all day – and if that wasn't strange enough, 1524m higher up another abandoned operation where apparently the soviets made nuclear bombs during the cold war. In the present era of glasnost, the refurbished accommodation at Gaish is available to groups like ours.

Gaish is just above Big Almaty Lake, where we saw several gentians, among which the small *Gentiana falcata* stood out from the crowd. (below)



However the best was above the domes and dishes of the astronomical station, where up at 3353m (by four wheel drive this time), we saw the *Dracocephalum* pictured at the beginning of this article with the northern edge of the Tien Shan mountain range in the background, and as a finale the most perfect *Paraquilegia*, a plant a metre across!

---International Rock Gardener---



Giant *Paraquilegia* plant in the Tien Shan

---Gardens in the Mountains---

The next report is from a talented couple from Budapest, Kata and Ferenc Zoltan who will share some photos from their favourite places.

Kata will make their introduction:

We are an alpine plantaholic couple from Hungary – not exactly an alpine country. We spend all our summer holidays somewhere in the Alps, botanizing and photographing. I do the botanizing and my husband, Ferenc, wields the camera. We like to return to the known places at different times to see the same species (or even the same plants) in different phases of their life. Photographing and studying alpine plants, and alpine gardening are not widespread in Hungary, although rock gardening is “fashionable”. But many hobbyist rock gardeners don’t distinguish alpine plants from rock plants tolerant of dry conditions, and there are no specialist alpine plants nurseries in our country.



We have our “alpine garden” in little troughs [on a balcony](#). These are cared for and systematically photographed by me. The plants are mostly grown from seed or bought abroad. I also grow other perennials in pots.

Nature always gives us the utmost pleasure of a beautiful and really exciting garden, as you can see from my husband’s [pictures online](#).

Here we offer some alpine combination plantings in the wild.

---International Rock Gardener---

Alpine Groupings and Rock Gardens in Nature Text Kata, photos Ferenc Zoltan

As I can't have a real garden, I always try to find them in nature, during our mountain trips. All alpine plant hunters know that there are species that love to share space with others or at least don't detest others in the neighbourhood, and there are the hermits that grow on very exposed rock ledges mostly because they just can't compete with others for nutrients and water. Very good examples are *Androsace helvetica* and *A. vandellii*.

Here I would like to show some alpiners growing together, making attractive combinations of colour and form as well as natural rock gardens. The plants shown here are not symbiots, they live in the same place because of the favourable microclimatic conditions.



Eritrichium nanum with *Saxifraga paniculata*

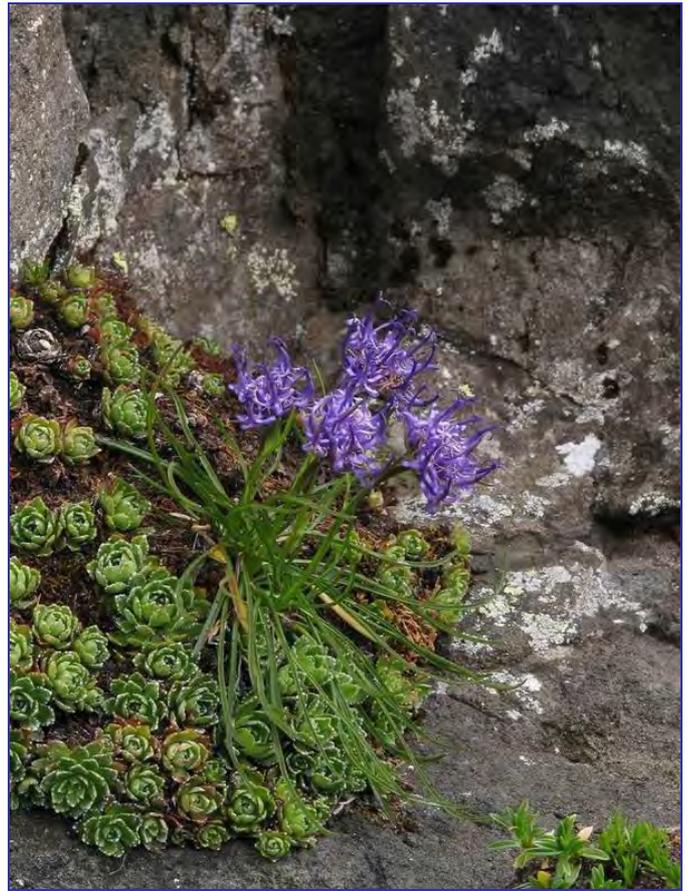
Eritrichium nanum inhabits crevices. On Padon ridge in the Italian Dolomites it can often be seen together with other rock dwellers like *Minuartia* sp. or *Saxifraga* sp.



Eritrichium nanum with *Minuartia* sp.

---International Rock Gardener---

Another crevice plant is *Physoplexis comosa*, which we have seen a few times growing in close vicinity with *Saxifraga caesia*. Since they bloom at the same time and make good colour and leaf texture contrast, this combination deserves to be imitated in man-made rock gardens (below, left)



As for colour and form, I found this duet of *Phyteuma hemisphaericum* and *Saxifraga paniculata* very appealing, though the latter was not yet in flower (above, right)



Blue is frequently seen with yellow or with pink.

Left: *Gentiana acaulis* with *Geum montanum* – a very frequent partnership (certainly not biological) on acidic rocky slopes and alpine meadows.

Below: *Iris pumila*, blue form with *Potentilla arenaria*, on a dolomite hill near Budapest, Hungary.



---International Rock Gardener---

Below: *Campanula cochlearifolia*, *Saxifraga paniculata* and *Senecio incanus* in a little “rock garden” on Padon ridge.



Blue with pink :

Below: *Gentiana acaulis* and *Primula daonensis* in Valle di Cedec, Ortles, Northern Italy.



Campanula cochlearifolia with *Thymus* species in a dry riverbed in the Dolomites

---International Rock Gardener---

Below: A pleasing natural rock garden with *Gentiana brachyphylla*, *Ranunculus glacialis* (rose form) and *Leucanthemopsis alpina*



Pink with white is also frequent and can be very showy:



Left: Here *Leontopodium alpinum* and *Erigeron* (*alpinus* or *polymorphus*) make a fine couple. When rose and white is mixed with yellow, the effect is more striking: right: *Dianthus alpinus*, *Alchemilla anisiaca* and *Orlaya grandiflora* in the Ennstaler Alps, Austria.

---International Rock Gardener---



Left: *Gypsophila repens*, *Saponaria ocymoides* and *Helianthemum grandiflorum* beneath *Pinus mugo*, in a limestone scree.

Below left: A pale form of *Primula clusiana* growing beside the sulphur yellow *Primula elatior* on the Raxalpe, Austria.



Above, right: A really vivid effect, which we have often seen in the Ortles, Northern Italy, is created by *Gentiana punctata* growing in the middle of a clump of *Rhododendron ferrugineum*.



Left: Often different flowers of the same colour grow side by side. Gardeners know that different shades and flower forms are interesting together, and nature is the consummate garden designer.

Here is a combination of blues: *Gentiana verna*, *Polygala amara* and *Myosotis alpestris*.

---International Rock Gardener---



Left: Two white flowers of different shape, blooming later in the alpine season: *Leontopodium alpinum* and *Saxifraga caesia*.

And finally, here are some beautiful rock gardens made by nature we have seen in the Alps.

The top of the Padon ridge, in the Dolomites, is full of breathtaking rock gardens. They are very well made gardens: from snowmelt till snowfall you can always find blooming species interspersed with decorative seed heads of earlier flowers.



---International Rock Gardener---



Above: Each 'island' of vegetation is a little garden



There can be a large range of flowers in each garden

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Two immense scree slopes in the Dolomites.....



...one with *Potentilla nitida*, *Saxifraga caesia* and *Campanula cochlearifolia*



...the other with *Saxifraga aizoides*, *Papaver rhaeticum* and, probably, *Minuartia verna*

---International Rock Gardener---



Above: Another scree bed, this time of silicate rocks, “planted” with *Ranunculus glacialis* and *Primula daonensis*, above Stilfserjoch, Northern Italy.



Left:

A rocky wall in the *Pinus mugo* zone in Raxalpe, Austria.

In spring the bushes of *Erica carnea* sprinkled with rose flowers are decorated with the larger and more vivid blooms of *Primula clusiana*.

The grey limestone rocks appear in between, giving a real rock garden illusion.

---International Rock Gardener---

Last but not least my favourite nature-made rock garden, seen in the Ortles, Italy. Between large silicate rocks covered with colourful lichens, *Ranunculus glacialis*, *Cerastium uniflorum* and *Saxifraga bryoides* grow together in a beautiful arrangement stylishly decorated with graceful grasses.



---Plant Portrait---

Daphne malyana Blečić

Text and photos: Vlastimil Braun

Characteristics

Daphne malyana belongs to a group of the smaller daphnes with *D. jasminea*, dwarf forms of *D. oleoides* and above all *D. petraea* which competes with *D. malyana* to be the smallest daphne of all. Although botanists repeatedly confirm the southern Greek *D. jasminea* as the nearest relative of *D. malyana*, from a horticultural point of view this very dense, knobbly shrublet resembles a super-dwarf *D. oleoides*. The daphne is named after Karel Maly (1874-1951), a prominent Bosnian botanist of Czech origin.

D. malyana has leather-like leaves condensed at the end of branches. Leaves, with a short stem or sessile, are up to 18mm long and up to 6mm wide. The ends of young leaves are tipped but older leaves are bluntly elliptic to ovate with a smooth margin. Leaf colour is dark green on the upper side and blue-green on the reverse. The leaves are deciduous.

The white corolla shows its crystalline appearance in the sun with yellow anthers with orange pollen, flower diameter is 10-12mm with four pointed perianth lobes. Berries are yellow to pale orange.

Habitat

As an endemic species of the western part of the Balkan Peninsula it is distributed in the mountains, canyons and gorges of N. Montenegro, E. Bosnia and W. Serbia. *Daphne malyana* grows in crevices and fissures of limestone cliffs in elevations from 600m up to 1900 (2000) m a.s.l. In the canyons it likes the northerly rocky slopes, while in the mountain regions it also occupies eastern to

---International Rock Gardener---

southerly sites. In Montenegro it may be found in the canyons of the rivers Piva, Komarnica, Susice and Tara; in Bosnia in the mountains Zelengora, Volujak, Maglic, Vucevo.

The area of the daphne's occurrence (canyons, karst areas and high peaks) is extraordinarily segmented with high differences in elevation. Wild conditions together with minimal road access create natural protection for this species and explain why it is so difficult to investigate this daphne in detail – so related information is limited.

D. malyana is a petrophytic or chasmophytic plant whose roots actively grow into the tightest fissures. In wild localities daphne forms caespitose shrublets only a few centimetres high that colonise crevices very densely– see photo below.

Plants flower profusely and after several weeks the flowers are followed by yellow to light orange berries.

Daphnes spread with help of wind, gravity and probably birds but this species does not like competition from other saxatile plants, e.g. potentillas, so the plants are rare in its native localities. Occasional seedlings found at the foot of a cliff are always small plants as older plants die due to unsuitable conditions and competition from other plants.



Left: *Daphne malyana* in the wild

Horticultural Features

D. malyana is a fully hardy plant. With respect to the fact the species looks similar to *D. oleoides* it can be no surprise that cuttings are not suitable for propagation. I prefer grafting and as a good rootstock I use *D. mezereum* – see photo below. As a grafted plant *D. malyana* is an easy daphne but one has to consider the planting rootstock and not the saxatile daphne. Thus it is necessary to adjust the corresponding conditions and aesthetic location in the rock garden.

D. malyana bears berries when grown in good conditions but germination has not been widely tested due to the rarity of the species.

Seedlings grow fast in their first year, second year growth is slower and in following years growth is slower and slower

and may be only a few millimetres per year.

When grown in suitable conditions *D. malyana* forms, after 20 – 30 years, a compact, free flowering cushion 6cm high and 20cm in diameter. In the Spartan conditions of say, a hole in tufa rock, the growth could be very slow up to only 10 cm in diameter after 20 years.

In suitable conditions the species is very healthy, long lived and brings extraordinary pleasure to the grower. It should be planted in the most prestigious place in the garden to enjoy its extraordinary beauty.

In respect to its rarity it should be propagated from cultured plants only.

Note: Minimum growth increment of D.malyana is valid also for grafted plants grown in lowlands (compare with e.g. D. petraea or D.jasminae, which can grow several times faster as grafted plants)

---International Rock Gardener---

so dwarfness is strictly genetically encoded and so I consider *D. malyana* to be the smallest daphne of all. I am in doubt about botanical descriptions which have stated that *D. malyana* has range of growth up to 30cm in low elevations (but plants also grows in crevices).

It doesn't correspond with my experience and the experience of my friends who have grown *D. malyana* for a long time.



Plants, which in nature grow up to 30 cm can't belong to the same form of *D. malyana* as is its typical mountain form and it is a question, whether the plants belongs to the same species. It could be, for example, a saxatile form of *D. oleiodes* that normally grows in different ecology (stony slopes and meadows).

Because both species have overlapping ranges it is also possible that *D. malyana* may be only a subspecies or variety of *D. oleiodes* V.B.

Above: *D. malyana* grafted on *D. mezereum*

---Surprising Discoveries---

We are delighted to have received, at short notice, an unexpectedly happy story from the war troubled country of Afghanistan. We do not have space to include the whole article here so we provide just a taste of it.

This story concerns a South African on security detail in Taliban territory who found a beautiful plant, which proved to be *Iris stocksii*... an Iris of the Juno section that had been lost to cultivation.

The finder was Juan Piek, whose copyright photos accompany the article. He managed to get samples delivered to five Iris experts, including Tony Hall at Kew, with a little help from Paige Woodward.

It all began when, trying to identify the plant, Juan stumbled on the website of Paige's [Pacific Rim Native Plant Nursery](#) and sent her an email.

We are all too well aware of the horrors of war so I imagine that most of us will take heart from the account of this extraordinary event and the brave and welcome finding of this flower.

Paige tells the full story, with many more photos, here in the [SRGC Forum : a Tale of *Iris stocksii*](#) .

Below left: The subtle colours *Iris stocksii*- showing the long, narrow, pale edged foliage.

Below right: A plume of smoke in the Afghan landscape, where the Iris was found.

