

*Bulletin*  
*of the*  
*Alpine Garden Club*  
*of*  
*British Columbia*



*Vol 52 No 4*

*Autumn 2009*



## *Alpine Garden Club of BC*

Internet Home Page: [www.agc-bc.ca](http://www.agc-bc.ca)

<b>President</b>	Linda Verbeek
<b>1<sup>st</sup> V.P.</b>	Philip MacDougall
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> V.P.</b>	David Sellars
<b>Past President</b>	Doug Smith
<b>Secretary</b>	Allison Carson
<b>Treasurer</b>	Amanda Offers
<b>Membership</b>	Ian Gillam
<b>Programs</b>	Philip MacDougall
<b>Pot Shows</b>	Dana Cromie
<b>Library</b>	Pam Frost
<b>Annual Show</b>	Diana Hume, Karen Thirkell
<b>Plant Sales</b>	Mark Demers
<b>Seed Reception</b>	Marilyn Plant
<b>Publicity</b>	Joan Bunn
<b>Open Gardens</b>	Lisa O'Donnell
<b>Refreshments</b>	Dorothy Yarema
<b>Webmaster</b>	Chris Klapwijk
<b>Bulletin Editor</b>	Alan Tracey

### **Committee Members**

Margot Ketchum - Mark Demers  
Chris Klapwijk - Karen Thirkell - Lisa O'Donnell - Bob Tuckey

### **Honorary Life Members**

Margaret Charlton  
Francisca Darts - Pam Frost - Daphne Guernsey - Bodil Leamy  
Ian & Phyllis Plenderleith - Geof Williams – Bob Woodward

Meetings are held the second Wednesday of each month except, July and August, in the Floral Hall, VanDusen Botanical Garden. Doors and Library open at 7:00 pm and the meetings start at 7:30 pm. Please bring plants for the plant draw; the proceeds of which go toward paying for the hall rental.

Front Cover: *Paradisea liliastrum*: 2250 m, Vall de Sorteny, Andorra. Photograph by David Sellars

## **Special Club Business:**

### **NOTICE OF MOTION**

At the Annual General Meeting the following motion will be presented:

Moved that the fiscal year end of the Alpine Garden Club of BC changed from August 31 to June 30.

### **New Bulletin Section**

It may be of some value to club members if the Bulletin contains a section for those who are looking for specific plants. In order for this to be of value to all members, those who submit enquiries should provide some details of the plant characteristics: size, shape, flowers, and other properties that make this a desirable plant. The native habitat of the plant would also be of interest. The request for information can be directed to [agc-bc.ca/contact.asp](http://agc-bc.ca/contact.asp) found in the club website or to the bulletin editor.

### **Spring Plant Show**

This Spring, in the process of changing bulletin editors, an important component of our club activities was neglected. The following is the report on our 2009 Spring Plant Show by Diana Hume.

Our Spring Show this year occurred on Easter Weekend. Karen Thirkell and I thought at first that this might present a problem but, in fact, it really did not. Saturday turned out to be a lovely day and we had a small but steady flow of visitors, some coming in after the Van Dusen Easter Egg Hunt. Sunday was not so pleasant unfortunately and we had fewer attendees.

We seemed to have had a smaller show at first glance, but on counting up all the entries, we found there were actually a few more pots than last year.

Also, it was wonderful to see that there were more members entering plants this year. The judges all commented on the fact that the quality of the plants brought in was very good.

A big thank you is in order to all the volunteers who helped set up and take down the tables, table cloths, table skirts, etc. It amazes us that it is done so quickly.

We would like to encourage more members to consider entering plants in the show next year. It's not too early to start thinking about this now. You don't really need to have an Alpine House. Perhaps you could plant in clay pots and then put the whole pot in the ground. Plants that don't like winter wet could be grown under an eave or even under larger trees or shrubs such as Rhododendrons.

If you have trouble getting to Van Dusen on the Friday evening plant delivery time or on the Sunday at 4pm for plant pick up, consider sharing the job with another member.

Here are the trophy winners:

- Best in Show: Philip McDougall
- Best Woodland Plant: Philip McDougall
- Best Alpine Plant: Joe Keller
- Best Cushion Plant: Mark Demers
- Best Fern: Pam Frost
- Best Plant in Expert Class: Philip McDougall
- Best Rhododendron: Philip McDougall
- Best Dwarf Shrub: Joe Keller
- Best Bulb or Corm: Mark Demers
- Best Native Bulb or Corm: Ann Dies
- Best Native BC Alpine Plant: Joe Keller
- Best Miniature Garden: Larry Wick
- Best Bonsai: Mark Demers
- Best Primula: Diana Hume
- Highest Aggregate Points: Kaz Pelka

## **Programs**

### **Philip MacDougall**

Our annual auction and Christmas pot luck will be on December 9<sup>th</sup>. Remember that the proceeds of the Christmas auction of plants go to charity. If you have plants to donate to the auction please bring them to the stage area prior to the meeting.

January 13<sup>th</sup>.

Members slides. I will approach several members to present slides they particularly like. If you have something you think the club might be interested in please let me know. I will send an e-mail to our membership with the names of presenters prior to the evening.

Feb 10<sup>th</sup>.

An evening of workshops. Hopefully we will cover a wide range of topics, perhaps seed sowing and aftercare, digital photography, setting up a mist system, best plants for troughs. If you have a suggestion for a workshop, e-mail me at [agc-bc.ca/contact.asp](http://agc-bc.ca/contact.asp) . I will see if it can be included in the program.

March 10<sup>th</sup>.

It is possible we may have John Watson speaking this month, he is part of the 2010 NARGS Speakers tour. From Bobby Ward: [http://www.bobbyjward.com/articles/plants\\_borders.htm](http://www.bobbyjward.com/articles/plants_borders.htm)

"The uplift around volcanoes in Chile and Argentina is one of the areas of concentration for John Watson and Anita Flores de Watson. The two have mastered the challenging identification of Andean flora on their own seed collecting trips and on expeditions they have led for the Alpine Garden Society and others. I have traveled along the northern Chilean coast with them, admiring yellow-flowering *Rhodophiala bagnoldii*, becoming horrified minutes later when the plants were bulldozed by highway construction crews, an indication of the rescuing nature of their work. A well-known specimen of gardens is *Mimulus naiandinus* and a selection, 'Andean Nymph', has become popular. *Ourisia polyantha*, *Anarthrophyllum desideratum*, and numerous *Alstroemeria* are among the jewels of their efforts. Currently they are working on a flora of the Andean *Viola*, both the rosulate and non-rosulate species, and are contributing sections to the series of Plantas Altoandinas, the Chilean Flora, published by the Fundacion Claudio Gay (Santiago). Arrangements for this talk have not been finalized.

April 14<sup>th</sup>.

Pam Eveleigh last spoke to us at the 2007 Western Study Weekend. Her talks on *Primula* are inspirational. Stunning photography and beautifully presented material, Pam's utter enthusiasm for this jewel of an Alpine genus make this a not to

be missed evening. <http://www.primulaworld.com/PWWeb/Index.shtml>

May 12<sup>th</sup>.

Our own Dave Sellars returns to the European Alps, the mountains from which the original concepts of Alpine gardening were taken. One of his hikes, he has several on this website, great photos here, check it out:

[http://www.mountainflora.ca/Flora\\_of\\_the\\_Alps/Tre\\_Cime\\_di\\_Lavaredo\\_hike.html](http://www.mountainflora.ca/Flora_of_the_Alps/Tre_Cime_di_Lavaredo_hike.html)

June 12<sup>th</sup>.

Please note this is the second Saturday of the month. We will be trying to organize a day trip to the Sunshine coast, hopefully to include a visit to Bill Terry's garden. It should be high season for *Meconopsis*. If we are unable to do this we will have a half day workshop on building and planting troughs, it will be a potluck picnic as well.

## **Open Gardens**

There will be no open gardens over the winter season.

## **Request for Information**

### **Roger Whitlock**

Information is being sought about Phyllis Munday and Iva Angerman and the double salmonberry and double thimbleberry.

Rodger Whitlock, an AGC member in Victoria, is trying to unravel the tangled history of two double *Rubus* forms, one *R. spectabilis*, the salmonberry, and the other *R. parviflorus*, the thimbleberry. He has ascertained that Iva Angerman found the double thimbleberry near Squamish, and that Phyllis Munday had some connection with a double salmonberry. He hopes that longtime members of the AGC may be able to shed some light on some vexing questions, viz:

1. Does anyone know when Iva Angerman found her double thimbleberry near Squamish?
2. Was Phyllis Munday's double salmonberry of her own finding? Or is it possibly the form now in commerce as 'Olympic Double', which reputedly originated on the Olympic Peninsula?

3. If Mrs. Munday did indeed find a double salmonberry, does anyone know where and when she found it?

4. Does anyone have an authentic plant of Phyllis Munday's double salmonberry? The plants of double salmonberry in the UBC Botanic Garden and in the Native Plant Garden of the Royal BC Museum are suspected of being 'Olympic Double'.

Please reply to Rodger Whitlock at 250-477-2229 or (email address removed)

## **Plants at the Fall Plant Sale, September 2009**

### **Linda Verbeek**

This year I didn't much feel like writing an article about the Sale, so I changed the way I am doing it. I asked a number of the growers and some of our experts in the Club what their top choices were in the pre-sale. Most of them gave me just the names, but one or two added their own comments, and I'll include those as they stand. Even though you still get my take on the plants, at least you get a different choice. Not everyone liked to have their names attached to the plants they chose, so some are anonymous, some not.

Ian Gillam and Dick Pearson not only picked the plants, but wrote a little about them – more direct experience than I can hope to offer.

Ian Gillam: *Geranium harveyi*. There were just two small plants, attractive because of their silvery, silky leaves. The flowers would be reddish purple and plants should spread to low carpeting clumps. Coming from South Africa they require a well-drained and sunny position, where they should be hardy to around  $-10^{\circ}$  C. *Asplenium septentrionale*. Only two pots of this small fern with tufts of dark green fronds were available. Unlike more familiar species of this genus, the fronds are divided into a few narrow strips, giving it one common name of forked spleenwort. It is native locally in northern parts (hence its specific name and its other common name of northern spleenwort) across America, Asia and Europe. *Lilium martagon* 'Album'. A few bulbs of this reliable garden performer were on offer. Flowers of the white form show up much better in plantings than the dark purple type. *Calochortus luteus*. A few bulbs of this Californian mariposa

were available. Like most of the *Calochortus*, it requires to be kept on the dry side for the appropriate periods of the year. As the name indicates, the cupped flowers are yellow and have contrasting dark centres. *Calochortus vestae*. From the same source, a few bulbs of this species were on offer. Its flowers are white with a central eye intricately patterned in dark red and yellow or orange. The name reminds us of Vesta's sacred fire tended by her white-robed virgins. I succeeded only in acquiring the last of these. Now I have to tend it!

Richard Pearson:

I bought two species of *Albuca*, *A. canadensis* (from S Africa.....) and *A. shawi*, which I hope to grow in a raised but uncovered bulb bed on Bowen Island along with *Crinum cowanii*, *bulbispermum*, and *variable*, several *Zephyranthes* species and *Habranthus tubispathus*, grown from club seed, species iris and other bulbs. (*Albuca* is a genus of South African bulbs related to *Ornithogalum*. The main difference is that in *Albuca* the inner 3 tepals don't open out. The result is a bit like a snowdrop, but the tepals are much heavier. *A. canadensis* is winter growing with a short summer dormancy and has spikes of white and green flowers, up to 2 m tall. *A. shawii* is summer growing and has yellow nodding flowers L. V.).

I also bought a plant of *Desfontainea spinosa* (a Chilean shrub, with holly like leaves and tubular, hanging, red flowers with yellow tips, up to 2 m. L.V.), which I will grow following the directions of Margaret and Charlie--full sun, well drained. This plant was originally raised by Philip MacDougall from his seed collected in Chile.



A new grower this fall was Jyl Tuck, coming all the way from Yale in the Fraser Canyon. She had quite a few interesting plants herself, and her choices were *Aquilegia longissima*, *Cyclamen hederifolium* white, and *Sempervivum calcareum*. *A. longissima* is sometimes considered to be a form or subspecies of *A. chrysantha*. It is a medium-sized columbine, maybe up to 40 cm high, with fine foliage and outward to upward-facing yellow flowers. The most striking features are the extremely long spurs, up to 10 or even 15 cm long,



spreading a little towards their tips. It is native to the southwestern states of the USA, and it tends to bloom later than most other columbines. However, you can find forms with spurs anywhere from the normal length to the 15 cm ones, so it is hard to know which is which sometimes. In either case it is a lovely plant, and it was chosen as well by another, unnamed person.

*Cyclamen hederifolium* is the most common hardy cyclamen, it is in bloom right now, and has been for about a month. Normally the flowers are the typical cyclamen pink, and pure white forms are not common (although one or two have shown up among the self-sown seedlings in my garden).

Mark Demers also chose a *Cyclamen hederifolium*, but he went for the 'pewter leaf' form. Normally *C. hederifolium* has leaves that are patterned with grey spots. In the case of the 'pewter leaf' the grey spots coalesce to cover the whole leaf, or sometimes all but the very edges, so the plant has an almost metallic sheen to it.

His other choices were *Dicentra* 'Burning Hearts', and *Echinacea* 'Tomato Soup'. *Dicentra* 'Burning Hearts' is a new hybrid *Dicentra*. I



found some good information about it on the web, and I kindly received permission to quote the following paragraphs: "Its species is almost never cited, though its primary parents appear to be the Japanese bleeding heart *D. peregrina* with its intensely blue-grey foliage & the western bleeding heart *D.*

*formosa*, though like 'King of Hearts' with the same well-defined white lips, it likely also has a dash of eastern bleeding heart *D. eximia* in its heritage. It was bred in chilly Hokkaido, Japan, by Akira Shiozaki & contracted to Skagit Gardens in Washington State for distribution in America. Shiozaki has developed several marvelous bleeding heart cultivars, but 'Burning Hearts' may well be the height of his achievement." ([http://www.paghat.com/burning\\_hearts.html](http://www.paghat.com/burning_hearts.html)) I have had a plant in a pot since the spring, a surprise, and most treasured, gift from our long-time member Bob Woodward, and it has bloomed right through the summer, although it is beginning to look a little tired

now. I imagine, like most *Dicentra*, it likes some shade – I certainly had it in mostly shade, though not under anything, and I made sure to water it. I might just try to divide it now and put some in the garden. There were two other people who picked the ‘Burning Hearts’, but interestingly, and fortunately, there were only a few plants that came in twice as first picks, and this was the only one chosen three times.

*Echinacea* of course is a standard cottage garden plant. The flowers are usually pink to purple, but in the cultivar ‘Tomato Soup’ they are truly red. The name is apt, although not particularly charming. Lyle Courtice, who was selling the plant, had arranged it beside an orangey-purplish *Heuchera* and the colour combination was striking.

Paul Krystof picked *Dracocephalum argunense*, *Rhododendron lepidotum* and *Campanula incurva*. *Dracocephalum* is a genus in the mint family, mostly distributed in the steppes of central Asia. *D. argunense* hails from north-east Asia. It makes a dense mound of many stems with narrow dark green foliage. Each stem is topped in midsummer by a small spike of fairly large, blue-purple mint flowers. According to the Flora of China (e-flora) it occurs on sandy or grassy slopes and on sandy river sides. It is sometimes considered a subspecies of *D. ruyschianum* which I grew and which flowered this summer. Only one or two stems did, but the flowers were quite beautiful.

*Rhododendron lepidotum* is a small rhodie from the Himalayas, with small, evergreen leaves and rather wide-open flowers in groups of one to three or four. They are apparently rather variable in colour, as they can be white, pink, yellow or purple, with or without spots. It grows above the treeline, so it should be able to stand a fair amount of sun, especially if it gets enough water.

*Campanula incurva* is a spectacular bellflower. It makes a fairly modest rosette, but then puts out these more or less horizontal arms which are brimming with huge, pale blue, upfacing bells. This summer was the first time I had a good plant in bloom, and it must have occupied more than a square foot. It also flowered on and on and on – there might still be a misshapen flower in it now, at the end of September. It is usually monocarpic, and I think self-sterile, so two plants would be needed to get viable seed. If you do get viable seed, it occasionally self-seeds. I raised it myself this spring, and found it

quite easy, so I'll put two in the garden for next year (or the year after, if they need to gather strength yet). Also, my plant does seem to have some new green tips at the base of the stems, so who knows....

Margaret Charlton picked *Pyrrosia linearifolia* 'Urakoryu Jishi', *Titanotrichum oldhami*, and *Tricyrtis macrantha* (see photo). The



latter was a replacement for a plant she had lost. I've talked about this plant before, maybe even twice. It is a most unusual *Tricyrtis*, in that it does not carry the flowers in cymes on the top of the stems, but individually in the leaf axils. The pedicels appear to be almost adnate to the leaves, and the buds develop very slowly, so you can see them

(*Tricyrtis macrantha*. Photograph by Paul Krystof)

sitting on top of the leaves months before they finally open. At which point they turn into long yellow bells, also most unlike any other *Tricyrtis*. One other person picked the same *Tricyrtis*.

*Titanotrichum* is a Gesneriad from Taiwan and China. It is apparently unusual in being rhizomatous – all other rhizomatous Gesneriads belong in the new world. The plant is a woodlander, and grows 40 to 50 cm tall, with a spike of yellow, foxglove-like flowers, that have various amounts of brown colouring inside. Apparently hardy to zone 7, and liking wet places, it might do well for us.

*Pyrrosia linearifolia* is a fern native to NE Asia. The normal form is probably even more grasslike than *Asplenium septentrionale* (see above), with short, narrow undivided fronds with rounded ends. It grows on trees or rocks in the wild. The cultivar 'Urakoryu Jishi' has what is called crested fronds, i.e. they are widened and ruffled at the top, even divided, and they also have some ruffles along the sides. It actually looks a bit like a very small, compact form of the houseplant fern *Pteris*.

Ferns were popular anyway: Two of Joe Keller's picks were ferns, *Asplenium septentrionale* and *Cheilanthes lindheimeri*. Someone

else chose the *Asplenium* as well, and it was Margaret Charlton's fourth pick.

*Cheilanthes lindheimeri* is a desert fern that occurs from Arizona to Texas and into Mexico. It is a small fern, with narrowly triangular fronds that are bipinnate, and look quite woolly on the bottom but bare on the top. It can apparently dry up till it looks dead, and then expand and flourish when the rains come back. I've just been given one, and am a little worried about it, but it seems to be less fussy than most of these desert rock ferns. The Botanical Garden at Berkeley, Cal. states that it has been growing happily for many years in an area of the garden that is regularly watered in the summer – even though winter is the rainy season there, like here, and in its native haunts as well. Still, I think I would protect it from too much winter wet – it doesn't have to cope with our winter temperatures in the wild or in Berkeley!

Joe's third pick was *Aquilegia longissima*, dealt with above.

Lyle Courtice, of HarkAway Botanicals, one of our growers, chose yet another fern: *Adiantum pedatum* ssp. *aleuticum*. This is a form of our native Maidenhair, to me it looked a little smaller overall, but apparently the differences are slight. It probably likes similar conditions as the typical *A. pedatum*, i.e. cool, damp and shady. The maidenhair fern is often found on north-facing slopes, actually, rather than on flat ground. His other two picks were woody plants, *Cornus alternifolia aureomarginata* and *Pinus heldreichii* 'Smidtii'. The *Cornus* is a small tree from eastern North America. In late spring it carries flat clusters of brilliant white flowers and dark blue berries later. It is unusual in that it has the leaves and the branches alternately, not opposite like the other *Cornus* species. This particular cultivar would have golden edges to the leaves. The *Pinus* is a very dwarf form of the Bosnian pine, with small bright green needles and large brown buds. It only grows about 2 cm a year, and a mature plant forms a ball 50 cm in diameter.

Ann Jolliffe picked *Primula rusbyi*, *Campanula* 'Jelly Bells', and *Anemone baldensis*. *Primula rusbyi* is a North American primula – not a very common phenomenon in our gardens! – with a limited distribution in the high country of Arizona and New Mexico where it grows in damper areas – moist meadows and cliff edges etc. It looks

quite a bit like its more northern relative *P. parryi*, with narrowly oblong leaves and a relatively tall stem with one umbel of rose-magenta flowers. It seems to be generally a little smaller.

*Campanula* 'Jelly Bells' is a selected form of the hybrid *C. X pulloides*, a hybrid between *C. carpatica* and *C. pulla*. It is a mat-forming plant with fat bells of slightly violet blue, and apparently very floriferous. It's supposed to be hardy to zone 5, but many of the true alpiners don't like our wet winter. It would be a lovely plant if it survives. Being a hybrid, it apparently doesn't set seed, and so doesn't even need deadheading!

*Anemone baldensis* is a lovely small anemone from rocky places in the Alps and the Balkans. It has finely divided leaves, and a single, bright white flower that is slightly hairy on the outside and may have some blue tinge on the outside too. I have tried to grow this plant from seed several times, but I have never had the clear white flowers that it is supposed to produce. I always got something that looked more like *A. multifida*. I now have seedlings of a wild-collected seed lot, and I'll be very curious to see what develops. The leaves definitely don't look like what I had before, so there is hope.

Now a few anonymous picks: one more vote for *Albuca shawii*, one for *Dicentra* 'Burning Hearts' and one for *Tricyrtis macrantha*. Otherwise: *Colchicum agrippinum*, an autumn crocus with rather pointed, and heavily tessellated flowers. It is supposed to be a hybrid between *C. variegatum* (with smaller flowers) and probably *C. autumnale*. It tends to bloom earlier than most in my garden, and the leaves are narrower and shorter than most, so it doesn't take up quite as much room in the spring. *Rhododendron augustinii* is a medium-sized Rhodie, up to 2 m or more, blooming in April or May, with 3-5 flowered trusses of mostly blue flowers – from mauve to almost true blue.

My own picks were *Epimedium grandiflorum violaceum*, *Semiaquilegia ecalcarata* and *Iris flettii*. *Epimedium grandiflorum* has the largest flowers of the genus, and I have wanted it for a long time. The variety *violaceum* has, as you might expect, violet flowers, with long, wide-spreading spurs. Violet is a colour I haven't got yet in *Epimedium*, and dry shade is never hard to find in my garden. *Semiaquilegia* is a columbine relative without spurs (the specific

epithet refers to that). The flowers are relatively small, and a dusky wine red – not exactly a showy plant, but very dainty, and I keep losing it! It is probably not long lived, like most columbines, and must not self seed.

Jason Nehring said that *Iris flettii* was like a small Siberian iris – the fan of leaves is definitely much smaller than any Siberian iris I ever saw – with nice blue flowers. I can't find anything about it on the web, so we'll have to wait and see.

Finally I asked a couple who are faithfully always the first in line among the public for their first picks. Dan Schwarz and Vel Rhodes picked *Haworthia* sp., *Dicentra* 'Burning Hearts', *Campanula* 'GF Wilson', and *Rubus henryi*. *Haworthia* is a genus of small leaf succulents in the Lily family, from South Africa. They look like small *Agaves* or something, and most, if not all of them, are not hardy, especially not in our winter-wet climate, as they greatly dislike wet feet at the best of times. They are grown for their leaves, which vary greatly in form among the species. *Campanula* 'GF Wilson' is another selection from the hybrid *C. pulla* X *C. carpatica*, the flowers appear to be somewhat more purple-blue than those of *C.* 'Jelly Bells' (see above).

*Rubus henryi* is a blackberry – and vigorous, too, as it can grow to 6 m. The leaves have only 3 narrow lobes and are quite smooth and shiny, so it looks more like a narrow form of ivy! The flowers are pink and the fruits black. I hope it has been checked before it was released into the trade and doesn't go feral like the Himalayan blackberry – we really don't need any more blackberry thickets than we already have!

## **A Spring of Resurrection. II**

### **More resurrections and other winter experiences**

**Linda Verbeek**

I thoroughly enjoyed Margaret Charlton's article in the summer bulletin about the plants she lost, and more particularly, the plants that came back from the dead. I haven't kept such meticulous notes, but I thought I might add my two bits to her story about miraculous recoveries and unexpected survivals. Everyone had a very cold

winter, but some parts of Vancouver had snow a few days earlier than others. In our garden, although we eventually accumulated over 60 cm of snow cover, the first serious cold (down to  $-15^{\circ}\text{C}$  at night) hit before there was any snow. Eventually all but the tallest shrubs were covered, and the snow didn't all disappear till the end of February. I too had a number of plants come back long after I'd given up on them, and also some other unexpected survivals.

For years and years I have had a *Morisia monanthos* in a pot (the plant came originally from Roger Barlow). This is a stemless crucifer from sandy areas on Corsica and Sardinia, with narrow, shiny, lobed leaves, and a very short panicle of large yellow flowers. A few years ago, Joe Keller propagated a whole bunch of new ones from my mother plant (something I haven't mastered myself), and he gave me several of those as a present. So I finally screwed up my courage, and planted one out in the garden last summer – in a hole in a piece of hypertufa. When I eventually got the chance to investigate, there was a very dead-looking rosette (the plant is usually evergreen), which lifted off from quite a ways down, so I was totally convinced the plant had rotted away completely. It must have been at least the end of May, when I suddenly realized that there was something growing in that hole, and it wasn't, as I had vaguely noticed before, a seedling of *Erinus alpinus*, but my *Morisia* come back to life. It hasn't flowered, however.

I found it surprising that *Geranium viscosissimum* should have died, after all, it is widespread in western North America, and grows well up in the mountains. However, it did eventually re-appear, in July, but didn't produce more than just a few leaves. Hopefully it won't get such a setback again, or it won't make it.

There were also a number of *Rhododendrons* that appeared to have died. The one I was most sorry to see go was *R. spinuliferum*. This is an unusual rhodo with tubular red flowers and protruding stamens, not at all like a normal rhodo, although the habit of the plant is typical. I don't remember how I acquired it, and I've never seen another one for sale. I only discovered its name when I saw it once in the Species Rhododendron Garden south of Seattle. It is not particularly hardy, and has had some serious winter damage before, but this time it was really gone. Sometime around midsummer I was mournfully digging up the corpse, when the corpse, so to speak, sat up: I discovered a

few green growing tips right at ground level. Of course I planted it right back, in what I hope is a somewhat better place, and added lots of goodies, and by now it is 60 cm tall again!

Three of the four other seemingly dead rhodies had shown signs of life before, only one really died, and I don't know what it was, because someone weeded labels half a life-time ago, when we were on sabbatical. Most of my rhodies are seed-grown, and almost all of them are species. The other one I want to mention is *R. lepidostylum*. It also lost all its foliage, but came back all along the branches. It has fuzzy, glaucous foliage with a clearly marked fringe, and small, pale yellow flowers, which are among the last to bloom.

I have some of the tenderest plants up against the house, and in a winter with much snow, that is a mixed blessing, because the fairly large eaves mean that not much, if any, snow accumulates against the house, so there is actually less protection. This showed up particularly with *Nerine bowdenii*. I have two clumps of these plants, both about 30 cm from the foundation, where they get some winter rain, but not the full dose. Last summer I had thinned out one of these clumps, and planted the surplus out in the vegetable garden for future reference. Being a little worried about exposing them to the full onslaught of the winter rains (as I thought), I had covered them with a plastic roof. But because I also think they like the extra warmth from the house, I had put a good layer of dried moss underneath. Eventually they also got snow cover. These bulbs survived better than the ones in the permanent locations, which had relatively little snow. Both of those clumps had a number of corpses in the spring, but the ones in the vegetable garden were all healthy and vigorous. I had a similar experience with *Rhodohypoxis*. As they have a reputation for disliking wet, they get protection too – which in this case meant no snow cover for several weeks. They nearly all died, except one clump which was out in the open, and so under snow. Maybe I should stop protecting them.

I have never had any luck with *Cistus*, although I love the plants. I had just about given up growing them, when I came across seed from *Cistus albanicus*. I reasoned that Albania is very mountainous and has quite a harsh climate, so I figured I would give it one more try. As luck would have it, I had planted it out just last summer, in a reasonably sheltered, and well-drained position, and it was snow-



covered fairly early, as it is still a small plant. But I was still quite surprised when it came out of the snow with even some of its leaves still intact, and proceeded to flower abundantly and even to set seed. I don't know how large it will get, the flowers are white, and not large, but somewhat bigger than those of *C. monspeliensis*.

*Halimium halimifolium* is a relative of the *Cistus*. It has smaller leaves, and yellow flowers with a large dark red dot at the base of each of the petals. I have that growing against the house too, and it is obvious that the house protects it – the branches close to the house survived, the ones further out didn't. I don't mind that, I prefer to keep the plant somewhat hedge-shaped, but I was very glad not to lose it. Even this year, with the branches mostly badly damaged (the really healthy-looking ones are shooting up from below) it managed to produce some flowers. Most years it puts on a show for a month or more. Each flower only lasts a day, but they keep coming. Often the plant takes a day off in between, so it is brilliant one day, rather poor the next, brilliant the one after that, etc.

I know from previous cold winters, that *Iris unguicularis* is perfectly hardy, but the maturing flower buds are not. A cold spell will kill the buds that have emerged above ground. However, this year killed all the buds – we had a few flowers early in the winter, but even after the weather moderated, not a single one later.

I must say that even after this last winter I am not going to stick with the tried and true. Enough surprises survived that it seems worthwhile to continue pushing the boundaries.

## **Alpine Treasures of Andorra**

### **David Sellars**

The tiny independent country of Andorra lies in the headwaters of the Valira River, which flows from Andorra into Spain through a rocky canyon. Except for this outlet, a continuous mountain ridge encircles the country. The northern boundary of Andorra is the main divide of the Pyrenees, which forms an almost unbroken mountain chain from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mediterranean.

Andorra is situated on the south side of the Pyrenees in rain shadow from Atlantic weather systems and experiences hot, dry air drifting up from Spain as a result of the high pressure systems of the Mediterranean. The climate of Andorra is consequently relatively dry, and snow cover has usually melted by the end of June. The weather is also very stable, which is a real bonus for hiking as every day is mostly sunny and clear.

Dry mountain climates always seem to support a rich alpine flora. Competition from plants needing moister conditions is reduced, and specialized plants can find a happy ecological niche. Andorra also enjoys a varied geology, with granitic rocks to the south, gneiss in the northeast, and shale and slate in the northwest. The shale areas are particularly good for flowers, with the shattered rocks forming an acidic substrate. In the center of Andorra, Pic de Casamanya is a limestone mountain with a flora quite different from that of the rest of the country.

Andorra has a reputation for tacky commercial development and a crowded main valley. However, the peak tourist seasons are in the winter for skiing and in August, when the people of France and Spain typically take their annual holidays. Late June and early July, the peak months for alpine flowers in Andorra, are considered the off-season there. Consequently the roads are quiet, the trails are not crowded, and it is easy to find inexpensive accommodation. Furnished *apartamentos* can be rented by the day. Traveling to the country is straightforward. We flew to Barcelona, which is only three hours' drive from Andorra.

There are many excellent hikes to choose from in Andorra. The terrain is rugged but often not precipitous, so there are opportunities for walking along mountain ridges. We always look for hikes with a high starting elevation so that we can spend most of our time in the alpine areas exploring for flowers. In late June 2007 and in 2009 we completed a number of splendid one-day hikes, mostly in northern Andorra, and some of the best are described below. For more information on hikes in the Pyrenees, visit [www.mountainflora.ca](http://www.mountainflora.ca).

One of the best access points to the alpine zone is where a paved road climbs to an elevation of 2200 metres below the clear, cold waters of the Tristaina Lakes in northwestern Andorra. A dramatic trail provides a circular walk above the three lakes, traversing steep grassy and rocky slopes. Within the first few hundred metres along the trail we spotted *Androsace vandellii* (see photo) clinging to a dark rock outcrop. A classic cushion plant which grows only in rock fissures,



*A. vandellii* has pure white flowers elegantly contrasting with the gray-green leaves.

The trail continues up to a grassy saddle with a surprising variety of interesting flowers. The pink flowers of *Androsace laggeri* (see photo) lit up the turf together with white *Ranunculus pyrenaicus* and *Gentiana pyrenaica*, which has very distinctive dark blue flowers quite unlike any other in the genus that we have seen. On the top of a small grassy knoll we were delighted to find some *Erythronium dens-canis* still in flower, although other plants nearby had already gone to seed.



The path climbs up to the right of the highest of the Tristaina Lakes and then traverses to the left between a series of cliffs. *Primula integrifolia* was abundant at about 2400 metres, and there were also fine specimens of *Gentiana alpina*, which is like a diminutive *Gentiana acaulis* but has olive-green leaves. We found more *Androsace vandellii* on the rock faces above the path near the high point of 2500 metres, together with creamy yellow *Pulsatilla alpina* subsp. *apiifolia* and sweetly scented *Daphne cneorum*. We returned to the car well satisfied with our first day in Andorra.

In the centre of Andorra, the limestone peak of Pic de Casamanya (see photo) can be ascended by an easy walk along a broad grassy



ridge starting at 1980 metres on a paved road where it crosses the ridge at Coll d'Ordino. The trail starts in an open pine wood, and we found *Hepatica nobilis* just starting into flower along the trail. Emerging from the trees, the trail climbs the broad ridge with occasional rocky bands that are easily climbed. At the first major

rock outcrop at 2300 metres, we found *Saxifraga media* (see photo) growing in crevices. This plant, endemic to the Pyrenees, has unusual red flowers rising on stalks from rosettes of symmetrical silvery leaves. *Saxifraga media* is in the Engleria subsection and has some similarities to *S. stribrnyi*. There were also beautiful specimens of *Daphne cneorum* var. *pygmaea* clinging to cracks in the limestone.



Amid the excitement of finding endemics, we were surprised to see a common rock garden plant, *Iberis sempervirens*, growing all over the ridge; we did not see it elsewhere in the Pyrenees. Although it can be found growing wild in the United Kingdom and the United States, *Iberis sempervirens* is native to the Mediterranean area and was not listed in our bible, *Alpine Flowers of Britain and Europe* by Grey-Wilson and Blaney. The limestone bedrock and proximity to the Mediterranean must provide the right conditions for this candytuft. We also spotted another Mediterranean species on the ridge – *Paronychia capitata*, a mat-forming plant with attractive gray foliage and numerous showy silver bracts enclosing the tiny, inconspicuous flowers.

As we approached the summit, a lovely field of blue *Myosotis alpestris* provided a foreground to the extensive views to the north. The summit

at 2740 metres is rocky and a good place to explore for plants. We found a lovely lilac candytuft, *Iberis aurosica*, growing in coarse scree together with another member of the cress family, pure white *Hutchinsia alpina*. *Silene acaulis* and *Saxifraga exarata* were abundant at this elevation.

Our most memorable hike in Andorra was the trail to the summit of Pic de la Serrera. This hike starts near El Serrat in the Parc Natural de la Vall de Sorteny, which was created as a conservation area for its interesting alpine flora. The parking lot at the start of the hike is at elevation 1780 metres, but before 10:00 A.M. you are allowed to drive higher up a gravel road to 1880 metres.

The trail follows a wide valley and the initial meadows are lush with *Dactyloriza* sp., *Pinguicula grandiflora*, and *Asphodelus albus*. Huge



mounds of the delightfully named *Molopospermum peloponesiacum* rise from the boulder fields. This member of the Umbelliferae has soft feathery leaves below large compound umbels of yellow-green flowers. As we climbed higher past pretty streams and light stands of pine, we found extensive drifts of *Anemone narcissiflora* (see photo) and *Pulsatilla alpina* subsp. *apiifolia*. The pure white flowers of the anemone in combination with the yellow pulsatilla and red *Rhododendron ferrugineum* were an unforgettable sight.

The path crosses over from the Riu de la Cebollera to the Riu de la Serrera. This stream flows through a particularly beautiful valley above the tree line, with extensive meadows of flowers. At about 2300

metres *Narcissus poeticus* (see photo) can be found in the meadows, together with some unusual orchids including *Orchis sambucina* (see



photo) and *Orchis simia*.

At about 2400 metres the meadows become stony and drier. Drifts of white *Ranunculus pyrenaicus* combined with the blues of *Gentiana pyrenaica* (see photo), *G. alpina*, and *G. verna*. *Primula integrifolia* was also decorating the turf and rocks with lovely pink flowers



together with the diminutive yellow *Gagea nevadensis*. The path climbs up to the Collada dels Meners at 2724 metres, and the main path then descends to Estany dels Meners de la Coma. Turning left at the pass and climbing along the shattered shale crest, we gained the broad south ridge of Pic de la Serrera and climbed a loose path up the scree to the summit at 2913 metres on the main Pyrenees divide. It was fascinating to look over blankets of cloud covering France, while on the south side of the ridge blue skies and sun prevailed.



Plants of interest at this high elevation included *Saxifraga geranioides* and *Veronica nummularia*, both Pyrenean endemics. There were also

very fine specimens of *Linaria alpina*, without yellow blotches on the flowers as more commonly seen in the Alps.

Another fine mountain accessible from Parc Natural de la Vall de Sorteny is Pic de l'Estanyo which at 2915 metres is the second highest mountain in Andorra. We found the ascent much easier than Pic de la Serrera as there is less steep scree. The flowers were very fine particularly beside the many babbling streams but were not quite as prolific as in the valley of Riu de la Serrera. The common orchids in this valley were *Nigritella nigra* and *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*.

Another interesting excursion in the El Serrat area is the walk up the Vall de Rialb (see photo). The lower areas of this beautiful valley are carpeted with *Erythronium dens-canis*, and there are fine specimens of *Paradisea liliastrum* (see cover photograph). Climbing through meadows full of *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* (see photograph) and *Androsace laggeri*, it is easy to



cross the divide into France and visit the well-named lake Estany Blau. Plant highlights during our trip included *Loiseleuria procumbens*, an ericaceous mat-forming plant of high alpine meadows, and *Pinguicula grandiflora* with large flowers to match its name.

With easy road access and accessible mountains, alpine flower hiking in Andorra is a wonderful introduction to the Pyrenean flora. For interesting alpines, we thought the area was comparable to the Dolomites but



much quieter. In late June and early July the roads in the Dolomites are crowded with cyclists, buses, cars, and motorcycles, and the trails are also busy. On some of our hikes in Andorra we only saw one or two other people. While there are many flowers in Andorra that can also be found in the Alps, discovering new plants such as *Ranunculus pyrenaicus* or *Gentiana pyrenaica* adds a special frisson to the visit. Rounding a boulder and being surprised by the elegant flowers of a group of *Narcissus poeticus* or coming nose to nose with *Androsace vandellii* hiding under an overhang makes the effort of ascending the Andorra mountain trails very worthwhile.

## Credits

A version of this article first appeared in the Winter 2008 edition of the NARGS Rock Garden Quarterly Vol. 66 No 1. All photographs by David Sellars.

## References

- Budeler, Roger. 2005. *Spanish East Pyrenees: Val d'Aran–Nuria, the Finest Valley and Mountain Walks*. A Rother Walking Guide. Munich: Rother.
- Grey-Wilson, Christopher, and Marjorie Blaney. 1995. *Alpine Flowers of Britain and Europe*. Collins Pocket Guide.
- Jermyn, Jim. 2005. *Alpine Plants of Europe*. Portland: Timber Press.
- Robertson, Alf, and Jane Meadowcroft. 2005. *The Mountains of Andorra: Walks, Scrambles, Via Ferratas and Treks*. Cumbria, UK: Cicerone.