



ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY

Dublin Group

TWENTY FIVE YEARS



NEWSLETTER NO. 51 - WINTER 2009

NOTES

CONTENTS

Editorial-----	4
News and Views-----	6
Seminal Successes by Harold Mc Bride-----	17
Origins by Carl Dacus-----	25
The Devil's Claw by Liam Byrne-----	30
Review of Recent Group Events-----	32
Book Reviews -----	50
Fixtures-----	52
Officers and Committee-----	54

Front cover illustration is of *Argyroxiphium sandwicense macrocephalum*
(Photo: Billy Moore) – see p. 9

EDITORIAL

Twenty five years: a significant anniversary and an occasion to reflect on what has been achieved and, perhaps more importantly, to look to the future.

It is interesting to consider the aims of the Group as set out in the notice of the inaugural meeting which was held on 26 November 1983 (see p. 24). To what extent these aims, particularly numbers one and two, have been achieved is very difficult to measure. For example, are there more people in Ireland growing alpines now than were doing so in 1983? I have no idea what the answer to this question might be. If we were to assume that there are now fewer people involved one could then ask if, in the absence of the AGS – Dublin Group, would there be even fewer. In other words have we made any difference? And how do we measure the Group's contribution to the conservation of native and rare plants? Not easily I would suggest. I think that it is problematic that the two principal objectives of the Group are purely aspirational and are not in any practical sense capable of measurement. There is, of course, nothing wrong with having aspirations, and I am not suggesting that we should drop or change our main objectives, but I think it is important to be able to have some measure of progress.

One fairly obvious yardstick is the number of members. I have written on this topic before so I won't repeat myself save to say that since I did so, the decline in our numbers which was occurring up to then has stopped, and the membership has remained more or less static. Unfortunately, we don't have accurate figures going back over the twenty five years, *mea culpa*, but my memory tells me that for the first fifteen or so years we had close to two hundred members whereas over the past few years we have been under one hundred and thirty. So we are a smaller Group than we were in the early days but, more significantly, the average age of the membership today is considerably higher; this view is based on observation only. If the Group is to survive, never mind meet its objectives, it is very obvious that we need to attract younger members. This should be a central aim in the years ahead.



THE ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY

December 1983.

This is the first newsletter of the newly-formed Group of the Alpine Garden Society, and enclosed with it is a combined Membership Card and Fixture List for the first half of 1984. We would like you to bring your membership card with you to all meetings.

The first Annual General Meeting will take place on Wednesday, 18th January 1984 at Wesley House, Leeson Park, Dublin, at 8 p.m. Nominations for membership of the committee will be accepted up to 7.30 p.m. that evening. The A.G.M. will be followed by a Slide Show entitled Alpines in Pots by Roy Elliott.

On 31st January at 7.30 p.m. at Ballsbridge College of Business Studies, Shelbourne Road, the five-week course, Plants for Small Gardens, which is for newcomers to gardening, will commence. The second course, which is a repeat of the first course, will commence on 13th March at 7.30 p.m. During March, we intend to hold a Seed Symposium. This will include a talk on the propagation of Alpines from seed; seeds will be available for sale and it is hoped to have small supplies of sand, grit and leaf mould also. Arrangements have been made to have clay pots and pans made to order and anyone interested in ordering some of these may let the committee know their requirements.

In the past, many people have enjoyed visiting Greenmount, and we hope many members will join our party this year on 28th April. Details are enclosed and early application is advised. We hope that some members will exhibit at the Show, but it will be necessary for them to make their own travel arrangements, as the coach will not arrive before 11 or 11.30 a.m.

Being a newly-formed body, we have a cash-flow problem, and therefore we would ask that all correspondence be accompanied by a stamped envelope.

We would like to mention two events being run by the R.H.S.I. Dr. C. Grey-Wilson from Kew Gardens, a well-known writer on Alpines, will deliver a lecture entitled Plant Hunting in the Himalayas on February 17th, and on 24th and 25th February, John Brookes, the well-known landscape and garden designer, is giving a two-day seminar on Garden Design. Details from the R.H.S.I.

May we wish all our members a very happy gardening year in 1984, and may we all benefit from an exchange of ideas and information.

The First Newsletter of the Dublin Group of the AGS

NEWS and VIEWS

In This Issue

As you will have gathered, this edition of the newsletter marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Group. I can't say that I was inundated with responses to my appeal in the last issue for reminiscences about the first twenty-five years but, thankfully, I got a positive response from **Carl Dacus** for a short potted history of the Group; thank you Carl. I really do think that the newsletter would benefit hugely if I could include little snippets from my readers dealing with people, plants, cultivation tips or whatever, so please sharpen your pencils and drop me a line. As always my contact details are on the back cover. Incidentally, the Group's first newsletter, written by **Joan Carvill**, is reproduced on page 5.

The main article was kindly contributed by **Harold McBride** of the Ulster Group. Harold's reputation as a highly skilled grower, propagator, hybridizer, exhibitor and lecturer needs no elaboration. In the article he muses on some of the superb plants he has raised from seed.

My most faithful contributor, **Liam Byrne**, once again writes about a favourite plant, this time choosing the lovely *Physoplexis comosa*. I can't imagine a newsletter without a contribution from Liam.

As always I have excellent reviews of our fixtures in the second half of 2008 and I really appreciate the trouble each of the contributors has taken.

Finally there are a couple of book reviews by **George Sevastopulo** (thank you George) and myself.

Fixtures

Our fixtures list for the first half of 2009 appears on p. 52. I know I have said this before but really no other society in the country offers as extensive and diverse a programme as we do.

The first meeting will be the **AGM** in Stillorgan on 15 January followed by a talk from **Ciaran Burke** on the plants and gardens of Finland. Those who attended Finn Haugli's talk on the Tromsø

Botanical Gardens in September were amazed at the range and quality of the plants that are grown there. Expect something similar from Ciaran who is a well-known plantsman and a regular contributor to *The Irish Garden*. Apart from Ciaran's talk the AGM offers us an opportunity to make suggestions, offer criticisms or just to show our appreciation for all the hard work that the Committee does on our behalf.

On 5 February at the NBG **Tony Rymer** will give a talk which he calls: 'My Garden - Squeezing a Quart into a Pint Pot'. Don't most of us have this problem and will Tony have the answer? A keen gardener for over 30 years, Tony grows a wide range of alpines, small (and not so small) perennials, bulbs and hardy orchids and has made trips to montane areas of Europe, Turkey and North America in search of wild flowers.

On Saturday, 7 February we have our **Annual Lunch** followed by a talk from that luminary of the Cork Group, **Miriam Cotter**, who will talk on 'Moisture-loving Alpines', a subject that assumes new relevance given the sort of summers we have been having lately. The delightful Royal St. George Yacht Club, Dun Laoghaire is, as usual, the venue. The lunch is always a hugely enjoyable occasion and, as numbers are limited, early booking is advised.

On Saturday, 7 March the Local Show, members' plant sale and a cultivation forum take place in St. Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan. The schedule for the show is included in the mail out. This is a great opportunity to show off your plants, buy new ones and hone your knowledge of growing, propagating and exhibiting.

Thursday, 26 March sees **Paul Cutler** talk on 'Bulbs through the Seasons'. Paul is Head Gardener at Altamont and is an excellent speaker as you will recall if you attended his talk in 2008. As Paul has a passion for bulbs I am really looking forward to this.

The highlight of our year's activities is arguably the annual **AGS Show** which opens to the public at 1.30 pm on Saturday, 4 April at the usual venue in Cabinteely. Val Keegan, our hardworking Chairman and Show Secretary writes about this important event below. As I have said before it is a wonderful afternoon out:

gorgeous plants on the benches; a hugely impressive display of various artistic representations of plants; special plant exhibits; a practical demonstration; a unique chance to buy rare and unusual plants from our own plant stall and from five commercial sellers; book sales; a raffle with great prizes; high quality refreshments at unbelievably low prices; and good company. Come and see for yourself and bring family and friends.

John Richards who is Emeritus Professor of Botany at the University of Newcastle talks on 'Flowers of the Italian Dolomites' at the NBG on 16 April. John, a former President of the AGS, judged at our Show a couple of years ago and is a regular contributor to the Bulletin. He has been growing alpines for forty years. He is the author of several books including a monograph on *Primula*. He has travelled to China, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Saudi Arabia, the US Rockies, Pacific North-West, and most mountain ranges in Europe, including the Greek mountains on more than 40 occasions. This talk should not be missed.

On Saturday, 25 April the **Ulster Group's Show** is at Greenmount, Co. Antrim. This is a very important event for the Group because the 2009 Show is their seventieth and they will be celebrating it in style. The occasion will be marked by the attendance of the **Joint Rock Committee** so if you have any special plants that might merit being presented to it be sure to bring them along. **Pat Crossley**, the Show Secretary is anxious to have as many exhibitors as possible so we should make a special effort next year to enter plants. And we mustn't forget the artistic section. If you can't exhibit, at least try to attend the Show. It is always a good day out and we owe it to our northern colleagues to give them maximum support on this very special occasion.

Personally I am delighted that on Saturday, 2 May there is a repeat visit to **Dargle Cottage Garden**, Dargle Road (N11 end) in Enniskerry because I missed the one last October. Mary O'Neill Byrne gives an account of that visit on p 34 and if that does not encourage you to take this opportunity to visit this unique garden at what is probably the best time of year to see it I don't know

what will. Be aware that the automatic gates will be open from 2.20 to 2.30 pm only so if you are late you won't get in.

On Thursday, 7 May **Timothy Walker** will give a talk entitled 'On Top but Never in Control - Tales from a Small Garden' at the NBG, Glasnevin. Timothy is a highly praised speaker. He read Botany at Oxford and trained at Askham Bryan, Windsor and Kew. He has been the Director at Oxford Botanic Garden since 1988 and is custodian of NCCPG Collection of Euphorbia. He is also the Ernest Cook Lecturer in Plant Conservation at Somerville College, Oxford. His talk will, I'm sure, strike a chord with us all.

A visit to my garden is planned for Saturday 23 May. What can I say except that you are all very welcome? There is very little parking on Braemor Park but there should be lots on Orwell Road which is close by.

Finally, to mark our twenty-fifth birthday there will be a celebratory **Midsummer Party** in the Botanic Gardens in Glasnevin on Saturday, 20 June. Hopefully the weather will be good so that we can wander around the gardens while we enjoy the refreshments, both solid and liquid, that will be available. This should be a particularly festive event so be sure to put it in your diary now. More details will be sent to you before the date.

The Silversword of Haleakalā (1)

I had the good fortune to have spent a week on the beautiful Hawaiian island of Māui last September. As well as having the usual attractions of an Hawaiian island Māui is also home to the 3055 m (10,023 ft) high dormant volcano called Haleakalā. The views from the summit are breathtaking so the volcano is a major tourist attraction, partly because there is an excellent road right to the top. For an alpine enthusiast, however, the mountain has a special significance. This is because it is home to the extremely rare, endangered and utterly spectacular *Argyroxiphium sandwicense macrocephalum*, known as the 'silversword', which grows at about 3,000 m and above. This plant, known to the Hawaiians as

āhinahina, meaning grey-grey is a member of the Asteraceae. There is an outlying smaller colony on Mauna Kea volcano on the island of Hawaii itself.



Argyroxiphium sandwicense macrocephalum (photo: Billy Moore)

The silversword starts life as a beautiful rosette of intensely silvery-blue leaves which slowly increases in size as it matures. It can live for up to fifty years or more at which stage the rosette can have a diameter of a half metre; then, being monocarpic, it flowers and dies. But plants usually flower earlier, between eight and seventeen years. The leaves are densely hairy and the hairs focus the sunlight to warm the plant when air temperatures are low. When the plant decides to flower a tall stalk emerges from the rosette bearing hundreds of maroon, scented sunflower-like flowers. Flowering usually occurs in June or July. The flower stalk can be up to two metres in height, although usually less, but at any height it is amazing. While I saw dozens of immature plants on the mountain I was lucky to find one that was in flower and, given that it is a genuine and fabled alpine and not often seen, I thought it deserved to be pictured on the cover.

Māui is beautiful with a wonderful climate, extremely diverse vegetation and beaches to die for, but for me its defining feature is the wonderful silversword. Haleakalā is a dormant volcano and is expected to erupt again within the next two hundred years. Let us hope that a means will be found to ensure that this superb plant can live on.

The Silversword of Haleakalā (2)

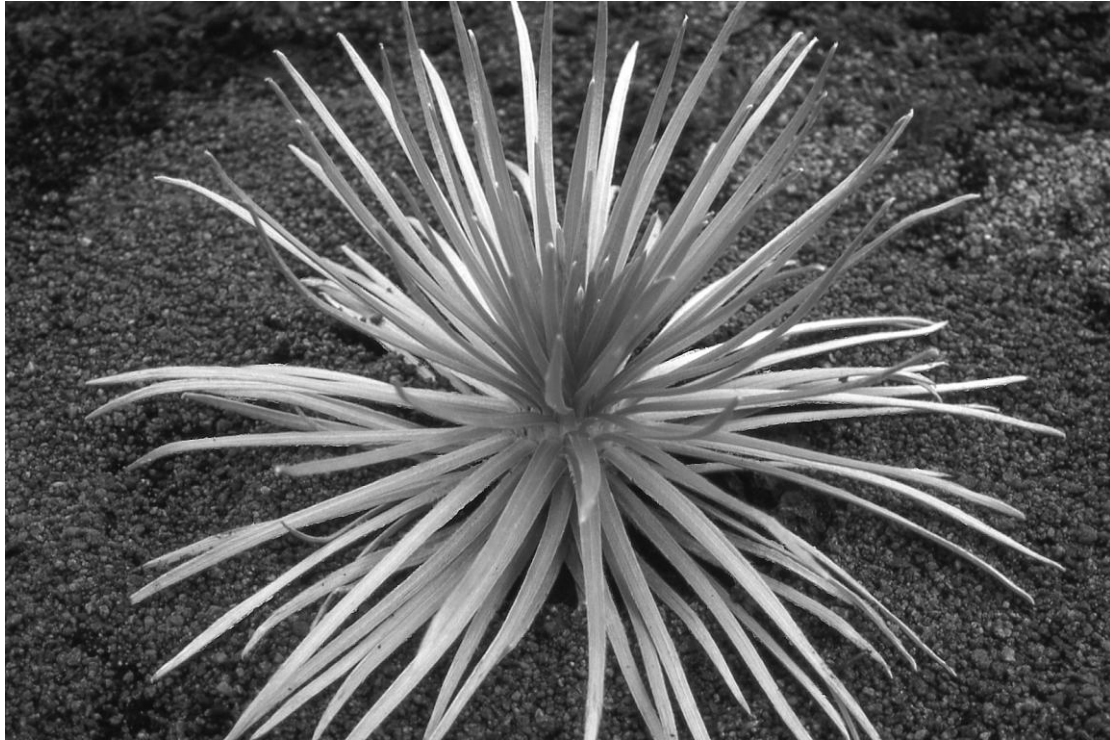
I spoke to **Harold McBride** about my experiences in Hawaii and he sent me the following.

In late December 1989 I received a letter from a former Dublin AGS Group member, **Richard Sullivan**, who at that time was living in California. Richard had recently spent a vacation in Hawaii and during his stay he visited a volcano, Mauna Kea, 3050 m. Richard told me how he encountered the most beautiful and amazing silver-foliaged plant he had ever seen. He also remembered that I was a keen grower and exhibitor of ‘silvers’ and kindly collected a few seeds for me to try. The plant in question was *Argyroxiphium sandwicense macrocephalum* or Hawaiian Silversword. It is almost certain that the first botanist to have been acquainted with this amazing plant was **David Douglas** of Douglas fir fame. Douglas was actually killed in 1834 in this area by a wild bull in a pit constructed to trap animals.

I must admit that until I received my seeds from Richard I had not heard of this plant, however, on reading **J. M. Gardiner**, RBG, Edinburgh (*The Garden* 104, 2:1979) in which he described *A. sandwicense* as being the most revered of plants “a masterpiece of design and one of the wonders of the plant world”, my interest was now fully engaged!

The following spring my seed germinated and I eventually pricked out approximately a dozen seedlings. They were grown on in the alpine house and three years later I exhibited one of them at the International Rock Garden Conference at Warwick where it was

given a special award and attracted much attention from the International delegates. One of the plants flowered in 1999 but sadly no viable seed was set. This plant is now very rare and fully protected in its natural habitat so we may not see it in cultivation again. The cultivation of these plants was written up (*By Harold Ed.*) in the AGS Bulletin vol. 59 no. 3 Sept 1991.



The Silversword in cultivation (Photo: Harold McBride)

75th birthday of the Scottish Rock Garden Club

The 2008 Annual Discussion Weekend of the SRGC took place in Glasgow at the beginning of October. It was a super event with a special effort made to mark the seventy-fifth birthday of the club. All the talks were of a dauntingly high standard with one of the highlights being **George Sevastopulo's** lecture which he called 'Burren - a Rocky Place'. Over the years I have heard a good many talks on the Burren but I can confidently say that this is the definitive one. I believe that George is to be asked to give this talk at Termonfeckin next year. **Brian Duncan** of the Ulster Group also spoke to great effect in Glasgow on 'Narcissus – from species to modern hybrids'. The Irish influence at this event continues next year when **Martin Walsh** will be a speaker.

2009 Show

From **Valerie Keegan**

Another new year – leading up to another Show – they seem to arrive more quickly as we get older! We have the early Show again, Saturday, 4 April, as the Ulster group requested the later date for their seventieth Anniversary. So all stops out please for a few plants from each member. And don't forget the plant sale: the financial health of the Group depends on it.

Our first Show at Killruddery was a trial one to see if we were capable of running a good Show with all its essential features, judges' lunches, teas for the public and a plant sale, all accompanying a lovely display of plants. That all means that 2010 is our twenty-fifth Show, not this year!



Jim Price, George Sevastopulo and Helen Dillon judging at our 2008 Show.
(Photo: Tessa Dagge.)

If you need advice or help – 01 2862616 – and any of our regular exhibitors will assist.

Oxalis versicolor

Also from **Valerie**

Coming up to Christmas we have very few alpines in flower, but one reliable flowerer that I possess is *Oxalis versicolor*. Not only does it flower at this time of the year but it does so in a spectacular fashion. It has red and white candy striping, showing best when the buds start to open each day. It seems to need the protection of a greenhouse as any plants in the garden grow but do not flower.



Oxalis versicolor (Photo: Valerie Keegan)

Oxalis is a genus of approximately 800 species world-wide. It contains many good garden plants and some pernicious weeds. I grow nine members of the genus - including two of the pernicious weeds!

The name *Oxalis* comes from the Greek – *oxis* – sour or acid – from the taste of the sap of some species. The seed capsules can shoot the small seeds a considerable distance from the parent

plant, hence some of the problems. Despite all of this I would not be without some of this genus in the garden. Many of the smaller species are highly decorative and make superb rock garden plants. The species we cultivate tend to come from South Africa and South America.

It is fascinating to reflect that many of our colourful species come from the Southern hemisphere - some flower during our summer and others during their summer - why is this? - what affects a plant to make it flower in one or the other?

I am now trying some species new to me – *O. massoniana* and *O. fourcadei*. They are both summer dormant. *O. massoniana* I got last year - in flower (orange) from Aberconwy Nurseries and it has started to grow again. *O. fourcadei* grew last year from seed and will hopefully flower later this year.

Our Website

From **Jamie Chambers**

I'll begin this update on our website by blowing my own trumpet, if you'll forgive me. Recently we received an email from a committee member of a local AGS group in the UK, who (the mad fool) had volunteered to set up their own website. She was asking for advice, as she'd reviewed various AGS sites, and was particularly impressed with ours. I glowed with pleasure briefly, but then the words 'bargepole' and 'touch' came quickly to mind.

Still, she's not the only one to like our site, as its use is growing steadily, 7,830 hits in October compared with 3,592 last November, with 782 different visitors connecting to us (versus 455). Not quite up to the peak around the Spring Show, but overall growth. Images continue to be a draw, and we now often receive messages from people who have got to know us through the site.

My latest changes have been aimed at introducing areas for members to share information. The Stories page is for members to tell stories about plants they've grown. I've begun it with one of my own, about a *Pleione* I acquired at the Termonfeckin plant

auction, and I'm sure we all have tales to tell which would be fun to share. Please take a look at your own garden and give it some thought.

The Horrors page is a special area for us to share horror stories about plants that should be avoided like the plague. Again, I've begun this with a piece of my own, about *Pratia pedunculata* – not, I confess, my own horror story, but my father's, and a very near miss for me. I'm sure many of you have advice like that - please share it with us.

As ever, you can email me at agsinfo@eircom.net, and let me know your thoughts, suggestions, contributions and feedback for the website, www.alpinegardensociety.ie.

I hope you have better luck than I've had Jamie – the response to my requests for items for the newsletter has been, well.....disappointing. Ed.

Pots

Michael Meagher has seven and nine cm, rigid, square, plastic pots for sale at ten and twenty cent each respectively. If you want any you should phone Michael (01 8382368) well in advance of any meeting and he will bring your order along. We are also hopeful of being able to supply durable plastic labels in a range of colours in the near future. We will keep you posted.

Editor

SEMINAL SUCCESSES

(All photos by the author)

Billy Moore's excellent article on seed sowing (Newsletter no. 49) has encouraged us to enhance our gardens with plants grown from seed, however, seed sowing and the resulting germination is perhaps the easy part, as major losses may be incurred at the pricking-out stage or in the days soon after this event. It is essential to give all young plants lots of 'TLC' if they are later to take their place in your rock garden, raised beds, troughs or alpine house.

A well-ventilated frame provides the ideal home for young plants where they can, if necessary, be given protection from strong sun which may lead to drying-out or scorching before they can become established. A frame will also, of course, afford protection from excess wet and slugs which can devour your small seedlings overnight!

Seedlings should be examined on a regular basis for any indication of aphid attack; one of the first signs that these pests are present is leaf-curl. Any infestation must be dealt with immediately.

To keep my garden well-stocked and allow me to contribute to AGS plant sales I prick out well over 1,000 seedlings each year; this of course is time consuming, however, I find it a very rewarding form of gardening and indeed quite therapeutic. Some alpine plants are short lived and must be propagated on a regular basis if they are not to disappear from your garden. I will now describe a selection of plants, some easy, some challenging, but all interesting that I have grown from seed.

Old Reliables

Dianthus alpinus seed germinates very quickly after sowing; the seedlings grow quickly and are soon ready for pricking out. This delightful alpine and its various colour forms including *D. alpinus* 'Joan's Blood' and a fine white form will flower at the end of the





first year, seed is readily available from the exchanges. *Campanula cochlearifolia* hails from the limestone mountains of Europe; this fine crevice plant with its charming little powder-blue 'fairy thimble' flowers spreads by slender rhizomes which, if detached, root easily. Recently I searched several nursery lists in vain for *C. cochlearifolia alba*. Recourse to the NARGS seed list resulted in my obtaining a fine form of this plant for my crevice bed.

Bulbs

Growing bulbs from seed is usually a slow process. The South African *Tigridia pavonia*, however, produces flowers the year following sowing. These spectacular flame or yellow, heavily spotted flowers are real 'show stoppers' in late summer.

Much more patience is needed to produce galanthus species or cultivar forms from seed. I collect and sow my seed when it ripens in June. Around fifty percent of the seed will germinate the following spring with the balance not appearing for a further year. I re-pot the resulting seedlings annually for up to four years when the first flowers will be produced. This is a very exciting time as seed from named forms or hybrids will of course be very variable;

however, most of them may be just as interesting and distinct as the many named varieties which now appear in catalogues at huge prices. My most interesting snowdrop seedling to date has a large and very distinct green heart on the outer petals and I have named it *G. 'Antrym'*.

Albuca humilis, a hardy bulb from the Drakensberg Mountains in South Africa makes a fine reliable trough plant. I find that it flowers in its first or second year from seed which is usually available from most exchanges.

Seed of *Eucomis zambesiacum* came to me from AGS Vice President, **Rod Leeds** who gardens in S. E. England. This *Eucomis* is small in stature (25cm) and its white flowers are a great asset to my raised beds in late summer. Seed is not ripe until November, so it misses out on the seed exchanges; however, I have passed seed and plants to various AGS friends so it should soon become readily available. You should expect seedlings to reach flowering size in two years.



We usually think of the hardy species cyclamen as suitable plants for the woodland garden. Some years ago, however, I requested ten named forms of *C. coum* from the SRGC seed exchange and planted the resulting fifty plants in a shaded trough. The result was quite spectacular and although the plants were eventually decimated by vine weevil I have since repeated the planting, this time using varied and attractive leaf forms which give added interest for several months pre and post flowering. This cyclamen

thrives in a trough which I top-dress with sieved leaf mould and bone meal annually. Regular doses of 'Provado' now take care of the pests!



Some High Alpines

Members of the genus *Androsace* are much sought after by alpine house enthusiasts. Most androsaces germinate well from seed and are easily catered for until the cushions reach 8/10cm across. The rosette forming, scarlet flowered *A. bulleyana* came to me as seed from that sadly missed plantsman and very talented artist, the late **Duncan Lowe**. Duncan gardened in Lancaster and was an expert grower of rare and difficult alpines. I have managed to keep this short lived plant going for many generations. Growing such a species from seed is essential if you want to maintain it in your garden. During a recent early summer visit to Billy and Anne Moore's fine Dublin garden, Ulster Group members were able to admire this stunning little plant flowering in a trough.

The rare New Zealand 'forget-me-not', *Myosotis albo-sericea*, sets lots of seed which germinates readily when fresh, but it requires great care to bring it to flowering as it seems to resent root disturbance after it passes the tiny seedling stage. Usually this small plant with its delightful pale yellow flowers is regarded as a subject for the Alpine House, but I have eventually got it established in my crevice bed by sowing the seed directly into the rock-crevices

where much to my surprise it has survived and indeed produced flowers.

Blue Poppies

Ireland has a long tradition for growing *Meconopsis* species. The badly missed Slieve Donard Nursery in Co. Down once led the way to popularize these fine plants of breathtaking beauty and elegance. For many years we depended on that wonderful hybrid *M.* 'Slieve Donard' which the late **David Shackleton** always described as the "best of all blue poppies". Sadly David never saw the recently produced fertile form of this hybrid which is called *M.* 'Lingholm', or 'fertile blue' strain, which is considered by many to be excellent. Flowering size can be achieved in one to two years from seed by using rich composts and excellent growing conditions to obtain multi-rosetted plants prior to flowering. Many other species of *Meconopsis* such as *M. napaulensis*, *M. integrifolia*, *M. punicea* and *M. delavayi* need to be grown from seed regularly to ensure continuity.

Popular Woodlanders

Anemonella thalictroides, that delightful North American woodlander is easily raised from fresh seed in its white or pale pink forms although seed from exchanges can prove unreliable. Always prick out your seedlings into a humus-rich compost and give regular liquid feeds to ensure you achieve plants of flowering size in two years.

In recent years I have along with many other gardeners become quite addicted to Hellebores. Few other plants give you such a wide range of colour forms or have such an extended flowering period and, of course, they are at their best in February and March when few other plants show the same ability to contend with the cold winds, frost and snow that we 'enjoy' in early spring. While *Helleborus x hybridus* produces lots of self-sown seedlings, I like to



Meconopsis 'Slieve Donard' top and *M.* 'Lingholm' bottom

select and sow good colour forms such as deep yellows and, of course, anemone-centered or doubles. As well as my own seed I usually purchase some from a leading English hellebore nursery. I sow my seed as soon as it ripens in early summer and prick out well in excess of 100 seedlings in February. These grow quickly and I re-pot them, each time increasing the size of the pots, in April, July and finally late September. A very rich compost and regular liquid feeding using a high potash fertilizer is essential to ensure the hellebore seedlings make maximum growth. With this intensive treatment some will flower the following spring with the majority following suit at two years. After I have selected the plants I require for myself (usually with some difficulty!) - I restrict myself to ten or so 'specials'- the rest of these popular plants are donated to charity or AGS plant sales where they readily sell at excellent prices. Perhaps the greatest reward obtained from all your seed sowing efforts and intensive cultivation is the pleasure you receive when you make a gift of one of these plants to a good gardening friend or a neighbour, indeed I find that a well flowered hellebore is always one of the most appreciated of presents.

Harold McBride



THE ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY

Tel : 983956

Mrs Joan Carvill,
Hon. Secretary,
168, Sandyford Road,
Dublin, 14

November 11th 1983

A group in Ireland of the Alpine Garden Society has been formed, and an inaugural meeting to launch this group will be held on Saturday, November 26th 1983 at 2.30pm at the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, Dublin and you are invited to attend. There will be a talk on Alpines with slide illustrations, followed by refreshments.

There will be plenty of time to meet fellow gardeners for discussion, and an opportunity to put forward your views.

The aims of the new group are :-

- 1) To promote and encourage the growing of alpine and rock garden plants, particularly as this form of gardening is suited to today's small gardens.
- 2) To conserve and maintain stocks of native and rare plants.
- ~~3) To arrange for sales and exchange of plants and seeds.~~
- 4) To provide a friendly forum for enthusiasts to discuss their interest.
- 5) To co-operate fully with all other horticultural bodies in Ireland, and to complement their activities.

You may not be able to come to this inaugural meeting, and we would ask you to consider becoming a member. The annual subscription is £4.00.

The committee intends to provide an interesting list of fixtures in 1984, and would welcome suggestions at the forthcoming meeting with a view to incorporating these in the future.

If you know anyone who might be interested in the society, please invite them along.

Provisional Committee : Joan Carvill,
 Carl Dacus
 Ken Kinsella
 Richard Sullivan

Notice of the Inaugural Meeting of the local group of the Alpine Garden Society

ORIGINS

The Dublin group of the AGS evolved from the Alpine, Cactus and House Plant group of the RHSI. The members of the committee running the group at the time were **Joan Carvill, Ken Kinsella, Dermot O'Neill, Richard Sullivan** and yours truly. As a committee we found that the diversity of interests of the group, i.e., alpines, cacti and house plants, made it difficult to work with. We found that running shows was fraught with problems due to the demands of other interests in the society. So we decided to look around to see how we could promote our favourite plants which were, of course, alpines.



A decision was made to go over to the Chelsea Flower Show and approach the Alpine Garden Society. Joan Carvill, Dermot O'Neill and I duly made the journey. Our first contact was with **Michael Upward** the then secretary of the AGS. We got a very positive response from Michael with one stipulation, and that was that we would have to break with the RHSI and set up an independent group. On our return it was decided that we should proceed to set up an AGS group separate from the RHSI. When I told the RHSI of our plans there was a certain amount of resentment and a suggestion from some quarters that we were being disloyal, but when I explained again our reasons for taking that decision we parted on reasonably good terms.

In the setting up of the group a number of people were approached for their backing. Of these, **Helen Dillon, Philip Shuttleworth** and **David Shackleton** who gave us their full support, come to mind.

The committee was comprised of Joan, Ken, Dermot, Richard and me, and our first meeting was held in Ken's house. I was elected chairman and Joan was appointed secretary. Dermot resigned later

from the committee and returned to the RHSI group. The immediate concern was to raise some finance and work out a programme of fixtures (with no funds)! Another major and difficult job was to find a title for the group; it proved impossible to get one that pleased everyone but we ended up with AGS Ireland, Southern Group. This remained our title until the formation of the Cork Group whereupon we became AGS, Dublin Group.

The first AGM was held on Saturday 26 November 1983 at the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin. This is a date I'm unlikely to forget as my daughter, **Caroline**, was born at 6 o'clock that morning. Another reason that I will never forget that day is that it was one of the first times that I had to make a speech in public; a terrifying experience! The meeting was very well attended and I must mention in particular the great turn out of the AGS Ulster group to help us get off the ground; this support has continued to the present day. The cooperation with the NBG has also been a very positive influence over the years.

Joan Carvill came up with the idea of running a course in the VEC at Ballsbridge. This proved to be very successful and brought in new members some of whom are still with us. Fund raising was achieved by selling bags of silver sand and *Osmocote* fertilizer. The classes were quite an experience. Joan, Ken, Richard and I covered various fields and we got a good response from our unfortunate students.

Ken Kinsella, who was show secretary, proposed having a show at Killruddery House. This proved to be a tremendous success and as a result we were allowed to have an official AGS Show the following year and each year since. This show was well supported with some outstanding exhibits; Philip Shuttleworth brought a truck load of superb plants and members of the Ulster group brought a large range of first class plants, as they do to the present day. Local members showed that they were not going to be

outdone; when I look back on slides of that day I think that it must have been one of our best shows, helped greatly by the many



The first Show at Killruddery in May 1985 (photo: Joan Carvill)

marble statues around the benches. The only thing that was missing was a corkscrew for the judge's lunch!

The brilliant idea of setting up an annual residential meeting at Termonfeckin came from Joan. The first meeting was held in the sitting room, with if my memory serves me right, talks by **Dermot Kehoe** on Campanulas and **Billy Moore** on Daphnes. This is now an eagerly awaited event with internationally recognised and local speakers involved. A waiting list has had to be opened over the last two years for people wishing to attend; a situation beyond all expectations when the idea of the first weekend was broached.

Trips to the Burren have also featured as memorable events to be treasured. My first trip was led by **Noel Kirby** and others by **George Sevastopulo**, where a wealth of information was imparted on plants, history and geology, followed in the evening by serious discussions on botany, history, geology and bed!!!!.

Visits to gardens in Ulster, Cork and closer to home are not to be forgotten. Those somewhat longer than average in the tooth will

remember, in particular, visits to **Rhona** and **Philip Shuttleworth's** superb alpine garden. In all cases we were made welcome and returned with new ideas and fresh enthusiasm to implement some of the plantings we had seen and suggestions that had been made in conversations during the trip.

Looking back, the idea of a small group of people selling sand and fertilizer in order to fund a mad idea of catering to a passion for a very specialised group of plants, i.e., alpines, and transmitting that passion to a wide audience seems absurd. We must have been mad and yet it worked when we look at the activities and successes of the Group as it is today. From that small start we are now using top of the range equipment to bring to our members and others first class presentations of what the AGS stands for.

This reflects well on the vision of the founders and the commitment and dedication of the committee members and those that work with them on the periphery of the group and bodes well for the future.

Carl Dacus



ALPINE
GARDEN
SOCIETY

(FIRST) SHOW
AND
PLANT SALE
AT

KILLRUDDERY, BRAY

ON
SATURDAY 11th MAY '85

FROM 2.00 P.M.

ADMISSION 50^p REFRESHMENTS.

DETAILS:- PH 983956



Poster for the First Show of the Dublin Group of the AGS – Drawn by
Mary West

THE DEVIL'S CLAW

Physoplexis comosa is the pearl of the Campanulaceae. When I grew it first it was known as *Phyteuma comosum*. It is a native of the Southern Alps, especially the Dolomites, where it grows above 1800 m in deep crevices. It is a tufted perennial forming clumps of toothed leaves from which arise clusters of very striking flowers. Each flower is like a miniature minaret, pale lilac at the base turning to deep purple at the top of the flower. In full bloom it is a gem and on mature specimens I have counted up to sixteen flowers per cluster. Coveted because of its rarity is *P. comosa alba*, a white form which I have seen only in books. It is an odd looking plant but in my view a very beautiful one.



Cultivation

I have tried several times to grow this plant in the open garden but without success. From its habitat I knew that it is a lime and crevice lover so I placed it between two rocks and put plenty of ground limestone around it. It is caviar to slugs and snails and they were not deterred by the slug pellets that I scattered around it. In the open garden it would probably do best planted in tufa and covered by a pane of glass in winter. I have grown it successfully in the alpine house in pots. It does well in equal parts of John Innes no. 1 and coarse grit with some ground limestone mixed in. I re-pot when necessary in spring as soon as I see the shoots appearing. From spring to autumn I keep it well watered after which I keep it on the dry side until the end of February. In the winter don't think you have lost it as the top growth dies away completely. During the summer I place the pots in the open in a nice sunny area not forgetting to surround them with slug pellets.

Propagation

The experts maintain that it can be increased by cuttings of young shoots taken in spring and rooted in a sandy compost in the alpine

house. The only way I have propagated it is by seed. I sow the seed when ripe in late August or early September. I crush the clusters of dry flowers and sow seed, chaff and everything in John Innes seed compost with added grit, covering the seed and chaff with more grit. I stand it outside until the seed pot gets frosted and I then bring it into the alpine house keeping the compost gently moist. In spring the seedlings will emerge and when the first true leaves appear I pot them on into my potting compost.

Finally, in case you were wondering about the title, *Physoplexis comosa* is commonly known as the ‘Devil’s Claw’.

Liam Byrne



Physoplexis comosa (Photo: Harold McBride)

REVIEW OF RECENT GROUP EVENTS

Growing Asian Plants at Tromsø Botanical Gardens, Norway by Finn Haugli

Northern Norway at first sight may not seem like the ideal place to garden, and one might even feel a degree of sympathy for the person who attempts to grow plants at 70° north. Tromsø Botanical Gardens in North Norway has, however, over the years developed a reputation as one of the world's finest gardens and has featured in numerous publications as well as in the recent BBC series *Around the World in 80 Gardens*. It is in fact the northernmost botanical garden in the world!



The gardens are well known to rock gardeners as having one of the finest collections of Sino-Himalayan plants. The person who is largely responsible for building up this enviable collection is the recently retired director, Finn Haugli. Several different collections of plants are grown at Tromsø, ranging from Arctic to South American species. It was, however, the Himalayan collection that was the basis of Finn's splendid talk to the Dublin AGS and the IGPS on Thursday, 18 September at the National Botanic Gardens. As a result of climate change these plants are proving increasingly difficult to grow, even in relatively moist climates such as Scotland and Northern Ireland. Tromsø is nowadays regarded by many as one of the best places for their cultivation.

In his introduction Finn compared the alpine climate of the Himalaya to the cool and reasonably moist climate of North Norway, where the average monthly precipitation is around 90 mm with the lowest in May and the highest in October. Also the winters provide a decent covering of snow and the summers are relatively cool with the average July temperature as low as 11.8° Celsius, all of which makes it quite a suitable climate for the

cultivation of Asiatic plants. According to Finn, the climate at Tromsø is much less arctic than one might imagine, thanks to the influence of the Gulf Stream and also because of its proximity to the coast.

After a brief look at some of the arctic-alpine flora that grow in the mountains close to Tromsø, Finn showed us a sample of the range of Asian alpine plants that grow not only in the Botanic Gardens, but also in his own private garden. It is tempting to wax lyrical about all of the spectacular plants that Finn showed; however, the editor would not be best pleased! Instead, I will briefly mention just a few that I was particularly taken with such as *Codonopsis ovata*, which Finn considers to be one of the best of this genus for the alpine garden as it has a tidy habit. It is interesting to learn that *Corydalis buschii*, which is relatively slow-growing in this country, is invasive in Tromsø!

The vigorous clumps of the various species of cremanthodiums were perhaps the plants that most impressed; these are often considered to be extremely difficult to grow and even experts often fail with these refined daisies. Another group of plants that are a challenge in this country, but which Finn has found to be almost invasive in his own garden, are the Lady Slipper Orchids, *Cypripedium* spp., and especially so the Chinese Slipper Orchid – *C. guttatum*. Autumn flowering gentians are invaluable for providing late colour in the garden and Finn showed several impressive species including *Gentiana ornata*.

Meconopsis grows particularly well in Tromsø and nearly every garden in the area is home to at least one member of the genus. Of the perennial blue forms he considers the Scottish cultivars, 'Mrs Jebb' and 'Dalmaine' to be two of the best. It is not often that a plant in cultivation impresses me more than in the wild, but his robust specimens of *M. delavayi* were far superior to any that I have seen of this perennial species in China. One of the more interesting *Meconopsis* hybrids that he showed was *M.* 'Dagfinn', a sterile and rather vigorous poppy, which is reckoned to be a cross

between *M. grandis* and the highly variable *M. simplicifolia*. It arose from a batch of wild collected seed of *M. grandis*; the cultivar name is not yet official. Another extremely beautiful hybrid poppy is *M. 'Marit'* with large cream-coloured flowers. This is a complex hybrid which was made in Tromsø and there are at least three species involved in the cross. Particularly large flowered forms of *Nomocharis aperta* drew gasps of admiration from the audience. The vast selection of primulas that are grown at Tromsø range from those that are quite easy to grow to those that are something of a challenge such as *P. obtusifolia*. Finn concluded his excellent talk by looking at some of the cultivars and species that make up the sizeable *Saxifraga* collection at Tromsø Botanical Gardens. Major contributors to this collection were Ger van den Beuken, Peter Smith and Karel Lang. I was impressed by the fact that the gardens were not just a collection of plants but were designed to present a pleasing naturalistic appearance.

Martin Walsh

Visit to Dargle Cottage Garden

Our visit to Dargle Cottage Garden in Enniskerry on Saturday, 4 October started with the threat of rain and storm but a small group, wisely as things turned out, decided to brave the elements.

Turning off the busy N11 towards Enniskerry, through wrought iron gates, we suddenly found ourselves in what must be the most unique garden in Ireland. Looking across the Dargle Glen was the main house, Dargle Cottage (what an understatement), surrounded by a great variety of trees and shrubs planted right down to the river over 100 feet below. When we arrived, the head gardener, **David Koning** gave a short talk on the history of the gardens and then a guided tour.



The Dargle Valley was in the Eighteenth Century a tourist attraction, similar to Glendalough, where people went for walks and picnics and for less sunny purposes to 'Lover's Leap'.

In 1947 Sir Basil Goulding decided that he would design his own garden so he bought a small cottage beside the Dargle River. The surrounding garden was almost a sheer drop into the valley but he was undaunted. Once he had started work he realized that the garden would not be complete unless it spanned both sides of the river so he bought the land on the other side, which was originally the Kilcronney Golf and Country Club.

Today the garden, which is privately owned, covers seventy to eighty acres, mainly woodland with six to seven acres in grass and fifteen to sixteen acres of plants.

In the upper part of the garden, surrounded by many varied species of trees and lush vegetation is an amazing steel framed wooden summerhouse (now a listed building), with walls of glass to allow views from all sides (one can only imagine how wonderful it must be to sit there at night time with the river rushing by underneath).

Between this building and a large round water lily pond one can't miss the giant bronze sculpture 'Queen Maeve' by Patrick O'Reilly, seeming to march alongside a semi-mature yew tree. This and O'Reilly's 'Flight' sculpture (part human, part bird) are just a few of the many works dotted unobtrusively around the gardens. One of the most unusual is 'The Goddess in the Gap' by Fidelma Massey.

The garden paths lead up slopes with ever changing views and around every corner there is something to attract every taste - rare trees, shrubs, sculptures and water features. At the moment all the pathways are being re-laid with mosaics which have a theme, e.g., one pathway has what appear to be giant ants crawling along the mosaic.

I had spent the previous week in the West of Ireland and had visited the Burren and the Lady Gregory estate at Coole, where there is a famous photo of her sitting under her favourite catalpa tree, so I was delighted to find that there are many catalpas in the Dargle Garden one of which is a ‘Champion Girth’. The catalpa has large heart-shaped leaves and bears white flowers and long fruits resembling slender bean pods, hence the common name, Bean Tree.

We walked across an expanse of lawn dotted with more shrubs and trees like *Magnolia campbellii* and a weeping black mulberry (an all round ‘Champion’), past curved borders planted with berberis, rhododendrons, viburnums, agapanthus, acers, echiums and roses, all mingling in a very unstructured way.

Back down to the river we crossed a metal bridge, built in the early seventies which leads upwards to the main house. Overhanging the terrace is another summerhouse with an outside winding staircase. From this vantage point one can view the whole garden looking down over the tops of the tallest trees.

Across the terrace past an outdoor swimming pool are steps through a small archway completely decorated inside with shells. From here looking over the railings, the ironwork forming the notes from Handel’s Water Music, one can see down to the rock garden planted with agaves, yuccas, aloes and many tender plants. In case we hadn’t already had enough excitement for one day, the rope bridge, built in 1999, was waiting to be crossed – a challenge, but worth it.

All through the gardens the sound of the river adds a strange and almost dangerous atmosphere as it rushes through the gorge - this year the Dargle flooded again.

It is a great credit to Sir Basil and his successors that they have succeeded in using the dramatic natural landscape of the Dargle Valley and turned it into such a wonderfully peaceful retreat. It is a privilege to be allowed to share this natural beauty spot.

As I drove home I wished that I could have stayed longer, enjoyed each little vista and had time to examine each and every tree and shrub. The news is good, however, because on 2 May next year we have been invited back to see the rhododendrons and azaleas in full bloom. There is a treat in store for us.

Mary O'Neill Byrne

Autumn Show, Plant and Bulb Sale and Cultivation Forum

Despite the lovely weather there was a small entry of plants on the show bench at our local show held on Saturday, 11 October. I wonder if the reason might be that we concentrate on spring flowering plants and don't pay enough attention to autumn flowering species, or, could it have anything to do with the fact that the autumn show is non-competitive?

However, there were a huge number of good plants for sale and George Sevastopulo had brought some interesting bulbs also for sale. The sale was for members only and offered a great opportunity to acquire unusual alpines at reasonable prices. There were free seeds and leaflets for anyone who wanted them. Nobody needed to go away empty handed.



Billy Moore gave us a talk on seed sowing and gave us a list of alpines which we should try from the AGS seed list. It is due out soon. His talk was full of useful tips. For example, wetting the *Perlite* before mixing it into the compost so as to avoid breathing the dust; and that it was much more economical to order big bags of it from the garden centre. He suggested putting about 1 cm of *Perlite* in the bottom of pots to assist the drainage while providing a reservoir of moisture for the roots to seek. He also gave us a recipe for potting-on compost. He answered a lot of questions.

George spoke about potting up bulbs. Tulips need not be planted until November and he recommended that tulip bulbs should be

dried off during the summer by hanging them in old tights to keep them away from rodents. He said that there was no need to put crocks in the bottom of pots but that it was important to cover the drainage hole with very fine mesh to keep worms and other beasties out. As nutrients run out very quickly, he suggested that bone meal should be added to the compost mix. The bulbs should be planted on a layer of coarse sand halfway down the pot. An obvious tip, but one not often thought about, is to plant the bulbs away from the rim of the pot because when they flower they look so much better. When labeling, he said, put the number of bulbs in the pot on the label. Bulbs need to be fed with potash. Tomato food is suitable but at half strength as soon as you see growth, and should be applied every couple of weeks during the growing season.

These talks were most informative and filled me full of enthusiasm. The afternoon ended with a welcome cup of tea.

Barbara O'Callaghan

Henrik Zetterlund - Alpines in Gothenburg, Sweden

National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, 16 October, 2008

Henrik Zetterlund is a renowned Swedish botanist, plant collector, author and lecturer. He is the horticultural curator at Gothenburg Botanic Garden – a remarkable garden where many fine and rare plants are grown in climatic conditions that those of us who garden here in Ireland would find difficult.

Some of the rare and difficult alpine plants that he discussed are grown in purpose-built alpine houses but many of us were surprised at the number of beautiful plants that were planted outside and survived winter temperatures of -20°C . *Cirsium eriophorum* is a very enticing thistle and *Lychnis miqueliana* with its lovely burnt-orange flowers would grace any border. Henrik showed us *Phlox idahoensis*,



a rare American native with brilliant white flowers. It is not in general cultivation and he feels that it would make a very good plant if given the acid soil it needs. *Dentaria microphylla* he described as “his pride and joy”. He discovered it growing in the Caucasus in 1982 and he introduced it into cultivation. Among the many plants we saw that night, one of the most desirable was *Clematis tenuiloba*, a beguiling, tiny clematis from the Rockies in north America. Henrik Zetterlund has named a fine hybrid that he grew from seed after his daughter Ylva.

The talk was a treat – much wisdom and knowledge about plants was dispensed in very understandable language, laced with dashes of self-deprecating humour. And it was perhaps timely (and encouraging for those of us who use it) to hear from him that peat is a renewable resource in Sweden, Russia and Finland.

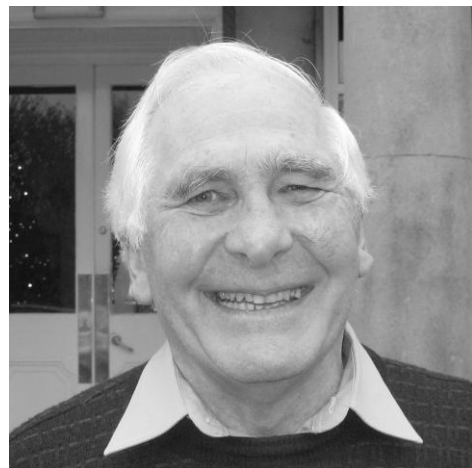
Among the large audience were the Swedish Ambassador, **Mr Claes Ljungdahl** and his wife **Gunilla** as well as the Director of the NBG, **Mr Peter Wyse Jackson** – a fitting tribute to Henrik who was awarded the Lyttel Trophy this year by the AGS for his work with alpiners.

Carmel Duignan

A Cretan Odyssey: George Sevastopulo

A capacity crowd gathered at St Brigid’s Centre, Stillorgan on 13

November to hear George’s report on his two visits to Crete, in spring 2007 and autumn 2008. After a fascinating geological introduction we were shown some glimpses of Cretan life in the northern town of Chania where the odyssey started. Unlike the Odysseus of old who left his Penelope at home, this



Odysseus in his wanderings had the support of Rose. The main area explored was the Omalos plateau in the White Mountain range where the peak rises to 2000 m. This is higher than is usual

on the Greek islands and the snow often persists until June. Much of the terrain is rough and rocky. The climate is harsh with relentless sun in summer and rainfall of around 40 cm per year. Nevertheless the flora is rich with over 130 endemic species. Moving on to specific aspects of the flora, the early slides showed those ancient olive groves and their underlying flowers which are a constant feature of the Greek landscape. Naturally bulbs play an important role in Crete and no less an important role in George's hierarchy. We had some stunning pictures of such famous plants as *Tulipa bakeri*, *T.cretica* and *T.doerfleri*. All are endemic to Crete, the first two being stoloniferous and closely related to the more readily available *T.saxatilis*. Another endemic, the beautiful (and rare in cultivation) *Crocus sieberi* was also found. Several species of the wind flower, *Anemone* were illustrated. Further south in the Imbros Gorge *Cyclamen creticum* with its beautifully marked leaves was to be seen as were also large clusters of dormant snails. The gorge had also the attractive *Malcolmia flexuosa*, a close relative of Virginia stock.

Aromatic herbs cover large areas of the Greek hillsides and an attractive origanum, probably *O dictamnus* was also spotted in the gorge. Another desirable plant seen in this area was the bright yellow *Linum arboreum*.

Three common members of the pea family *Ebenus creticus*, the annual *Lupinus pilosus* and *Astragalus angustifolius* were noted. Euphorbias are very common in Greece. Particularly interesting is *E. acanthothamnus* which forms low hummocks of closely intertwined spiny branches. It often serves as protection from goats for more delicate flowers which grow through it. Spili was the location of some good orchids; *Orchis provincialis* and *O. lactea*. *Ophrys iricolor*, a subspecies of *O. fusca* and the aptly named bumble bee orchid *O bombyliflora* were also found.

The autumn landscape yielded its own treasures. *Cyclamen hederifolium confusum* is uncommon in cultivation. Naturally the autumn flowering cochicums were in evidence, *C. macrophyllum* being the most notable. Also notable was the spectacular white

Urginea maritima with one and a half metre stems in their hundreds waving over the rocky hillside. Under glass it flowered in at least two Irish gardens thirty years ago! Much more difficult to find was one of George's favourite bulbs, *Sternbergia sicula* which he manages to flower in Howth. Golden goblets eventually revealed themselves growing from a rocky outcrop, a well earned reward for all the hard walking. Congratulations.

Dermot Kehoe

24th Alpine Weekend at Termonfeckin 21 – 23 November



Martin Walsh, Robert Rolfe and Peter Korn at Termonfeckin (Photo: Billy Moore)

The 2008 weekend was another triumph for **Joan Carvill** and her team who obviously worked very hard to ensure that everything went smoothly. The organization was faultless, the speakers superb, the social side friendly and great fun, and the staff at *An Grianán* looked after us all very well. Plantaholics were well catered

for by **Dr Keith Lever** and his son **Tim** of Aberconwy Nurseries, **Susan Tindall** of Timpany Nurseries, **Norris Maxwell** of Three Lions Nursery and **Brian Duncan** who was selling bulbs of small daffodils. Any remaining cravings were satisfied by our own plant sale which was a sell-out and by the auction which was conducted with great aplomb by **George**, assisted by **Carl** and **Valerie**.

Jamie's enjoyable table quiz was hotly contested and, of course, the best team won. **Peggy Parker**, as always, produced a testing crossword which most participants attempted and which was won by Joan. Peggy provided very tasteful floral decorations for the tables in the dining room and, helped by **Gwenda Wratt**, presented a most attractive array of greeting cards, notebooks, small *objets d'art* and other goodies for sale. As well as our own members there was the usual strong contingent from the Ulster Group. The Cork Group was also well represented and there were some visitors from Waterford and two from Germany. The weekend was completely sold out again this year with some participants in overflow accommodation in bungalows on the *An Grianán* campus. So, next year take those urgings to book early seriously or you may be disappointed.

Our speakers this year were **Peter Korn**, **Robert Rolfe** and **Martin Walsh**. We had two talks each from Peter and Robert, and one from Martin.

Peter gave the first lecture which he titled 'Rock Garden Design and Growing in Sand'. He gardens and has his nursery on five acres about thirty km east of Gothenburg in Sweden. He has an excellent website at www.peterkornstradgard.se where you will find superb pictures of many of the plants that he grows as well as pictures of the garden. Peter is a man of boundless energy as evidenced by the pictures of various rock beds that he showed, usually saying: "I built this in a week". His enthusiasm is infectious. He grows all his alpines in a gritty sand around twenty to thirty cms deep. To make a new bed he simply dumps a lorry load of the sand on the ground, shapes it a bit, puts in some boulders, top

dresses it with smaller stones and plants it up. He also builds crevice beds and ensures that the orientation of all the rocks is consistent throughout the garden. Various habitats are provided for his plants, ranging from full sun to deep shade and from very dry to very wet areas. He finds that the plants are slower to establish in the sand, but, once established they grow strongly and remain in character. They are watered when first planted but never again. He covers nothing in the winter during which temperatures are frequently at -15°C or lower, the record being -32°C .

He grows a huge range of plants in the sand including, surprisingly, shortias and rhododendrons. *Stellera chamaejasme* var. *chrysantha*, which is notoriously difficult, thrives for him. *Lewisia tweedyi* is very happy and seeds around, and *Pulsatilla vernalis*, another difficult plant, flourishes. Peter showed us a hugely diverse range of plants, many of them challenging and all of which looked very happy in his first class pictures. Clearly his regime is eminently suitable for many alpinists and should be adaptable to our conditions, although I doubt if we would succeed to the same extent for climatic reasons. In this area in Sweden the colder winters and hotter summers more closely approximate the conditions that these plants encounter in the wild than is the case in Ireland.

Peter has one very ambitious project on hand which I have no doubt he will complete successfully; he is building a series of beds which he intends to cover with an enormous alpine house which he plans to build himself with timber and glass.

During the winter he often works for the Gothenburg Botanic Garden and has built rock, peat, and crevice gardens there as he has also done in Scotland, notably for **Ron McBeath** and at Pitlochry. See what I mean about his energy.

‘Woodland and Building with Peat Blocks’ was the title of Peter’s second talk. Peat is regarded as a renewable resource in Sweden and its wide use in gardening there is quite acceptable. Very good quality peat blocks are readily available and Peter uses these as

walls around his peat beds. When he is building the beds he uses dry blocks as they are much easier to handle. When a bed is finished it is soaked, the blocks expand and the walls become fully stable. Stability is further ensured by sloping the walls slightly inwards. As well as standard peat beds he also has bog gardens which are kept sodden by the conditions in part of his plot. As with the sand beds the plants in the peat beds are given a good watering at the outset and after that have to fend for themselves. In this part of the garden plants such as primulas, lilies, nomocharis, arisaemas, cypripediums, trilliums, epimediums, erythroniums, shortias, rhododendrons and many others grow like weeds. Here Peter grows his favourite lily the rare and beautiful *L. soulei* as well as *Pleione limprichtii*, looking very healthy in the open ground.

From his nursery area Peter also sells plants which he grows mostly from seed, sowing some 2000 species each year. He gets the seed from several commercial outlets and also from seed exchanges with various societies and the botanic garden in Gothenburg. Another unique source of seed available to him is his botanist brother who cycles around the world collecting seed as he goes. He has to date collected some 5000 species.

It was fascinating to hear about Peter's innovative approach to growing alpines and one would dearly like to see the results in the flesh as it were. Given that Ryanair flies directly to Gothenburg there is a strong case to be made for a weekend visit to see the botanic garden and Peter's garden.

Our own **Martin Walsh** gave us a brilliant talk on his important, and successful, trip last summer to Bhutan which he called: "Bhutan – in the Steps of Ludlow and Sherriff". Martin had done a great deal of research before embarking on this arduous trek. His researches included a study of Ludlow and Sherriff's field notes and herbarium specimens which are kept in Edinburgh Botanic Gardens. The greater part of the expedition followed part of the

route taken by Frank Ludlow in 1949 and part of that taken by George Sherriff in 1937. They didn't always travel as a pair.

This was Martin's first completely digital presentation and it was seamless. As always his photographs were outstanding, particularly where he used the full screen for the dramatic landscapes of the Himalaya. Although the trip took place in the monsoon season Martin and his group were lucky to get a number of fine days to record these landscapes. The clear maps showing the route of the trek in detail enabled the audience to have a good feel for the different sites that were explored.

In the course of the talk, as well as seeing the landscapes and flowers, we were given an insight into the culture, customs, politics and architecture of the country. But the main focus of the trip, and therefore of the talk was the plants. And what plants! The area proved to be extremely rich and the group found all of the plants that they had targeted. In a short review I can only mention some of those that particularly appealed to me. *Maianthemum oleraceum* var. *oleraceum* is a gorgeous plant that I would dearly love to have in my garden, and, unlike many of the plants that Martin showed us it is growable. I don't think I could say the same for the three species of *Cypripedium* that we saw even if they were obtainable. A fine stand of *Cardiocrinum giganteum* was impressive as was *Streptopus simplex*.

We saw pictures of five different species of *Meconopsis* and the variation within the species was striking. The various forms of *M. bella*, including a pink one and *M. sherriffii* were important finds.

Two statuesque and quite specialized plants are *Rheum nobile* and *Saussurea obvallata*, specialized because they both produce translucent bracts which enclose the flowers and form a sort of greenhouse which protects the flowers from the elements but enables seed production to take place.

Chionocharis hookeri, sometimes called the 'Chinese Eritrichium' is a plant of an ethereal beauty that only grows above 4600 m. It is fiendishly difficult in cultivation. Martin and his team were lucky to

have seen fine specimens in their natural habitat. **Harry Jans** has said of this plant that it is the most beautiful alpine that he has seen in nature.

Other plants which made a strong impression were the lovely *Primula umbratilis*, *Corydalis calliantha* and *Pleurospermum benthamii*.

Martin finished his talk with a shot of the extraordinary Taktsang Monastery which dangles precariously off the side of a cliff, perhaps mimicking some of the rare and choice alpines which he had shown us.

Robert Rolfe who is, amongst other things, Assistant Editor of the AGS Bulletin, entertained, educated and delighted us with two mesmerizing talks. Robert is an exceptional lecturer, the most fluent I have encountered in any field. He is very knowledgeable and provides a wealth of information to his listeners and inspires confidence in them that the information is accurate. During his discussion of each plant he will talk about its habitat, mention who brought it into cultivation and who grows it, and suggest how best to grow it, often adding a relevant anecdote or two. It is not an exaggeration to say that his talks are encyclopedic in their scope and content. He is opinionated in the best sense of that word and his views are always worth hearing.

‘From a Packet of Seeds’ was the title of Robert’s first talk. This was no academic treatise on the art of seed sowing but was firmly based on experience: He is an expert grower, an observation that is borne out by the fact that he will soon have twenty ‘Farrers’ to his credit. Although a significant number of the plants he covered are not easy, many of them come readily from seed and are suitable for growing in the open garden provided they have



Primula umbratilis at Saga La, Bhutan (Photo: Martin Walsh)

good drainage. These ‘easy’ plants are also very beautiful often outshining their less tractable cousins. *Corydalis wilsonii*, a plant that used to seed itself all around my alpine house and one that I haven’t grown for years, is a splendid alpine and one wonders why it so seldom appears on the show bench especially in the beginners section. Perhaps Robert’s slide will change that. (While on the subject of slides I have to compliment Robert on the quality of all his slides in both talks. I was especially taken by his ‘*Erodium trifolium* and other sowings’ photo which showed an exemplary grouping of simple, easy, but beautiful alpines in his garden.) A review like this cannot just consist of a list of plants, but, sticking with the ‘easy’ theme, I think it is worth mentioning the first five plants featured which should be in every rock garden. They were: *Papaver alpinum*, *P. rhaeticum*, *Anagallis monellii*, *Omphalodes linifolia* and *Erodium trifolium*, and Robert discussed many other plants in this category.

One of the exciting aspects of growing plants from seed is the often striking variations that can occur between the individual seedlings. Careful selection of the best of the progeny can in time lead to the development of a superior clone as Robert demonstrated. All the plants that he mentioned are very desirable but here are just a few others that particularly appealed to me: *Lamium armenum* ssp. *sintenisii*, *Allium campanulatum*, *Ornithogalum chionophilum*, *Astragalus utahensis* and *Viola alpina*.

Robert delivered the last talk of the weekend on Sunday afternoon. ‘D-lights’ was his title and his subject was some ninety plants the names of which start with the letter ‘D’. Again we had a mixture of the easy and, given that the genus *Dionysia* was included, the very difficult. The other main genera covered were *Dianthus*, *Draba*, *Dodecatheon*, *Delphinium*, *Dactylorhiza*, *Digitalis* and, of course, *Daphne*. Most of the plants illustrated were of Farrer Medal quality so this talk was a visual feast. Among the dianthus, *D. microlepis* ‘Rivendell’ stood out. *Draba ossetica*, the best white according to Robert, and its cross with *D. mollissima* were for me top of this

genus. *Degenia velebitica* is a fine plant with seed generally offered in the exchanges. All the dionysias are gorgeous but unfortunately range from the ungrowable to the ‘very tricky’. Few of us are in a position to provide the constant air movement and the supplementary light that these plants seem to need to thrive. The easier ones are the various forms of *D. aretioides* and the hybrid, *D.* ‘Monika’. Dodecatheons should be more widely grown. They can be described as ‘classic’ alpines and in the main are not difficult. *D. pulchellum* ‘Sooke Form’ is charming. Delospermas are excellent alpines and *Ds. nubigenum* and *cooperi* are worth looking out for. There are some lovely dwarf delphiniums amongst which is *D. chrysotrichum* var. *tsarongense*. *Digitalis minor* (syn. *dubia*) is a dwarf foxglove with lovely soft pink flowers. This seeds about in my alpine house these days in a similar way to *Corydalis wilsonii* in the past. Finally to that genus of mostly dwarf alpine shrubs that every alpine lover wants to grow. Robert showed a number of forms of *Daphne petraea*, probably everyone’s favourite in the genus, each one surpassing the other. *D. valenovskiyi* is new to me but seems a very worthwhile species.

Peter started our weekend on a high note and that pitch was maintained right to the very end. We are very lucky on this small island where, unfortunately, the number of us who grow alpines is tiny, to have access to a forum where we can learn so much from such accomplished experts and at the same time enjoy the company of fellow lovers of the jewels of the mountains. I am already looking forward to next year. **George Sevastopulo** will give his super Burren talk and other names I’ve heard mentioned are **Henry** and **Margaret Taylor**, **Fritz Kummert** and **Susan Band** of Pitcairn Alpines. Full details in the next issue.

Billy Moore

BOOK REVIEWS

***Saxifrages: A definitive guide to the 2000 species, hybrids & cultivars* by Malcolm McGregor. 2008, Timber Press, Inc., Portland, Oregon. 384 pp. ISBN 13: 978-0-88192-880-8. £35.00**

Although saxifrages are part of the backbone of the rock garden, there has not been a comprehensive treatment of the genus *Saxifraga* since the work of Engler and Irmischer between 1916 and 1919 in *Das Pflanzenreich*. Several books, for example *Silver Saxifrages* by Beryl Bland and the updated AGS publication of Winton Harding's *Saxifrages: A Gardener's Guide to the Genus*, have been useful for gardeners but are superseded by this volume by Malcolm McGregor. The title of the book is accurate: it is a guide, not a monograph, and its coverage is definitive. It is aimed at gardeners rather than botanists, although it uses up-to-date taxonomic data derived from the work of the latter.

Malcolm McGregor writes with a light touch and the book is easy to read and interesting. I enjoyed the many asides, such as the origin of the name London Pride, which leads to a discussion of nurseries in the south of England in the seventeenth century. The volume is extensively illustrated with good quality colour photographs. These are particularly helpful in getting to know the many species of 'kabschias' that have been introduced in recent years from the Caucasus, the Himalaya and China, and which have been very important in breeding many of the modern hybrids. I also found the illustrations useful in putting names to several saxifrages that I grow that belong to sections of the genus that are incompletely covered in other books.

This is a book that should be on the shelf of every alpine gardener.

George Sevastopulo

***Bleeding Hearts, Corydalis, and their Relatives* by Mark Tebbitt, Magnus Lidén, and Henrik Zetterlund. 2008, Timber Press, Portland, Oregon. 176 pp. ISBN-13:978-0-88192-882-2, £25.**

This handsome book is described as a “thorough guide for gardeners and botanists ... [it] covers all the cultivated species, hybrids, and cultivars of *Corydalis*, *Dicentra* and allied genera in the bleeding heart family”. I can confirm the accuracy of this description. As well as providing essential botanical information about the species it deals comprehensively with cultivation, propagation and pests and diseases and so is an ideal reference book for us gardeners. There is even a list of plants recommended for beginners. Everyone, I think, loves these plants and we all grow some of them. This publication will tempt us, and help us, to grow more. It is illustrated with beautiful line drawings by **Paul Harwood** and **Adèle Rossetti Morosini** and with excellent photographs taken by the authors; most of the corydalis pictures are by Henrik, principally of the wide range of these plants that he grows in Gothenburg Botanic Gardens. The book is very well written with useful appendices and an excellent index.

Recent taxonomic changes are outlined and the arguments for the changes discussed. These arguments will give little comfort to gardeners who are now expected to call those old favourites, *Dicentra spectabilis*, *Lamprocapnos spectabilis*, and *Corydalis ochroleuca*, *Pseudofumaria alba*.

Our library has a copy of this new work, and that's great. For myself I feel I must have a copy to hand and as I am writing this before Christmas I have reason to hope that there will be a copy under the tree on Christmas morning.

Billy Moore

FIXTURES

Thursday, 15 January, 8 pm. AGM followed by **Ciaran Burke**, '60°-70° North - Plants and Gardens of Finland'. St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

Thursday, 5 February, 8 pm. **Tony Rymer**, 'My Garden - Squeezing a Quart into a Pint Pot'. NBG, Glasnevin.

Saturday, 7 February, 12.30 for 1 pm. Lunch followed by **Miriam Cotter**, 'Moisture-loving Alpines'. The Royal St. George Yacht Club, Dun Laoghaire.

Saturday, 7 March, 2 pm. Local Show, workshop and members' plant sale. St. Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

Thursday, 26 March, 8 pm. **Paul Cutler**, 'Bulbs through the Seasons'. St. Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

Saturday, 4 April, 1.30 pm. **Dublin Group AGS Show.** Cabinteely Community School.

Thursday, 16 April, 8 pm. **Dr John Richards**, 'Flowers of the Italian Dolomites'. NBG, Glasnevin.

Saturday, 25 April, Ulster Group AGS Show. Greenmount, Co. Antrim.

Saturday, 2 May, 2.30 pm (Sharp). Visit to **Dargle Cottage Garden**, Dargle Road (N11 end), Enniskerry.

Thursday, 7 May, 8 pm. Timothy Walker, Joint with IGPS. ‘On Top but Never in Control - Tales from a Small Garden’. NBG, Glasnevin.

Saturday, 23 May, 2.30 to 4.30 pm. Garden visit to **Billy & Anne Moore**, 32 Braemor Park, Churchtown, Dublin 14.

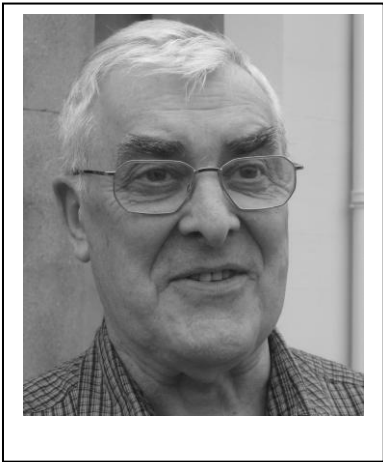
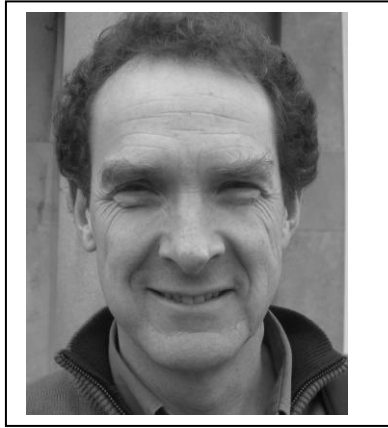
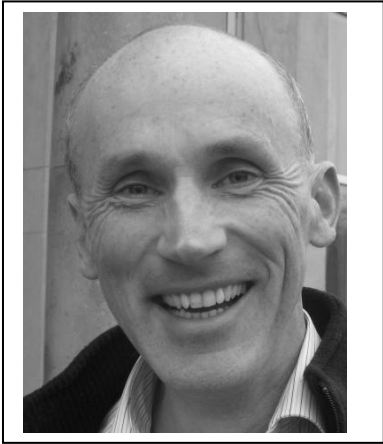
Saturday, 20 June, 7.00 pm ‘A Midsummer Party’. NBG, Glasnevin.

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

Chairman and Show Secretary:	Val Keegan
Hon. Secretary:	Joan Carvill
Hon. Treasurer:	Tessa Dagge
Fixtures Secretary:	Martin Walsh
Webmaster:	Jamie Chambers
Librarian:	Anne-Marie Keoghan

Committee Members:	Arthur Dagge
	Michael Higgins
	Barbara O'Callaghan
	Mary O'Neill-Byrne

Photos Opposite: Val, Joan, Tessa, Martin, Jamie, Anne-Marie,
Arthur, Michael, Barbara and Mary.





Dianthus alpinus 'Gwen's Blush' (top) and *Tigridia pavonia* - p. 18
(Photos: Harold McBride).

This newsletter is edited by **Billy Moore** who can be contacted at 32, Braemor Park, Churchtown, Dublin 14. Email: bjmoore@iol.ie.

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