



ROCK GARDENING

The Newsletter of the S.W. Scotland Rock Garden Group

Issue 11

Autumn 2009

FROM THE CONVENOR

A thing of beauty, is a joy forever. God wot!

Being, ideally at least, a thing of beauty, a garden ought therefore to be a joy forever. God wot! (Wot-ever that means!) Based upon recent personal experience, however, I find it much nearer the mark to observe that *a garden is a job forever. Is it not?*

The gardening year here at Overholm got off to a late start. By the time the weather was warm and dry enough to be outside and other distractions were put aside the plants, but especially the weeds, were well into growth and the beds looking sadly neglected. Consequently there has been a persisting air and indeed reality of 'catching up' throughout the season. This year for the first time I have felt that instead of me taming nature here into an orderly garden, as I had imagined vainly I was doing, the tables have turned subtly and nature is now, and presumably henceforth just as it intended all along no doubt, taming me.

The Met Office promised a 'BBQ summer' by way of long range forecast. Well, in consequence the weather has been pretty gruesome over much of the country but not strangely so bad here at Overholm (written late July!!). I think they might have meant B&Q summer and I have misheard. At any rate that is much nearer the mark as it turns out; for there are a number of DIY jobs here in the garden which need doing this year if they are ever to be done at all.

By way of example only, this week (last of July) I have been building a small 'creviced-terrace garden' (as I like to call it) of my own devising. This has been inspired by the quite magnificent crevice gardens seen in Czech-land as part of a rock-garden conference I attended a couple of years ago. I have been going on about these structures *ad nauseam* since the end of the conference, as you will recollect. You were advised a few Newsletters ago that I intended to have a crack at building such a garden on a small scale and that I should report progress in due course.

The Czechs have recourse to limestone pieces of roughly regular shapes and varying sizes with which they construct their marvellous crevice beds. Alas all I have by way of material are old, broken paving slabs; of which I have an inordinately large supply abandoned by previous house-owners. These I have set down a slope and at an angle compatible with that of nearby granite bedrock outcropping. Randomly broken edges have been exposed, slabs of differing thicknesses used and 'crevices' of varying thicknesses interposed. The smooth faces of the slabs were incised by chiselling where exposed so as to give some relief and to blend in with the nearby granite. I have used a very lean compost (lots of coarse sand but not much soil, inspired by Peter Korn's technique, although I couldn't go the whole way with him and use nothing but sand) and expect the concrete slabs to contribute a modicum of lime to the plant growth if needed.

There will be those purists who will criticise use of material and width of crevices both of which run counter to the Czech model. Such criticism is well made but I answer: 'so what?'. This is MY method; take it or leave it. Naturally only a limited variation of structure can be achieved using slabs. Personally I am very pleased with the end result.

Now all I need do is to plant it up with wee rock and alpine plants. They must be small and sedate in growth of course. I have a few ready to go in. Besides contributing the prime interest to the bed, the planting will ultimately hide blemishes (if any!) and tone down the 'regularity'.

No expense has been spared to bring you some photos of the building process. The site is that formerly covered by the 'lucky' white heather plant (foreground below); fatefully, possibly foolishly, removed at God knows what risk to good fortune.



The start site



During construction



face view



side view



top view

The finished article (unplanted)

Throughout the summer, as opportunity arose and DIY commitments allowed, I have visited a number of our members' gardens. That has left me with the very satisfying impression that we have a number of skilled, accomplished, adventurous gardeners in our midst and generous too; being all keen to share knowledge, experiences and plants.

Darrell Desbrow

IT ISN'T RAINING RAIN YOU KNOW ... it's raining cats and dogs —for weeks now in Dumfries & Galloway! Put away those soggy summer blues, however, and join your fellow members at the last of our summer events. On **Saturday**

afternoon, 19th September, there is to be a **practical demonstration of how to make a concrete trough** to be given by **Iain Matthewson** a member from Glen Luce. These troughs are especially good for growing some of the smaller more delicate alpiners in. You might have seen some of Iain's troughs at our plant sales; all nicely planted up. Well now he will show just how he makes them. Because of the drying period etc., it will not be possible for participants to try their hand at construction on the day alas. But then you will have a project at home when the rain drives you under cover!

Carolyn and David McHale have very kindly offered to host this event in the very fine garden at their house, **The Limes, Kirkcudbright from 2.00 p.m. to (roughly) 4.00 p.m.** Refreshment will be served during the afternoon. There is no charge for admission. In the event of rain (you cannot be serious man!) activities will proceed under cover.

Directions to The Limes , Kirkcudbright, DG6 4XD

Leave Kirkcudbright along St Mary's Street towards Dundrennan (A711). The Limes is about half a mile out from 'the cross' (centre of Kirkcudbright) on the right hand side, on the edge of the town and immediately after a partly built house on the right.

There are large brown gates which will be closed. Please park within the property as directed.

AUTUMN/WINTER PROGRAMME 2009/2010

Usually meetings take place at **Threave Garden Visitor Centre**, Castle Douglas **at 7.30 p.m.** (doors open 7.00 p.m.) **on the second Thursday of the month.** Please note, however, that, although the venue and time remain the same, **the first meeting this year is on Monday 19th October.**

A printed syllabus of talks is being distributed with this Newsletter.

☛ On **Monday 19th October 2009**, Markéta Nohelová is going to tell us about the Caucasus. The SRGC is funding her visit as their Travelling Speaker; for which we thank them most sincerely. Markéta's exact title is a bit of a mouthful: *Caucasus—from the wet west to the dry east, from Gentiana oschentia to Iris section Oncocyclus*. This is a fascinating mountainous floral region but one which few of us are ever likely to visit. Sit back, enjoy yourself and let Markéta do the hiking!

Dr Nohelová hails from the Czech Republic. She trained at the Horticultural Faculty of Mendel University (located in Brno, Czech Republic), spending six months at Hillier's Arboretum near Winchester. In 1995 she started working at the Botanical Gardens and Arboretum in Brno as a curator of perennials and alpiners; spending three winters as a trainee in Israel, Maryland USA and California USA. In 1998 she travelled with Vojtech Holubec to Altaj, Caucasus, China etc. (in hot pursuit of alpiners, I imagine).

☛ The November meeting sees the return of Henry & Margaret Taylor who have entertained and enlightened the Group before (2004). They are both long-time members of the SRGC and have wide experience of growing rock and alpine plants in their wondrous small garden in Invergowrie as well as being intrepid travellers in, and leaders of groups to, foreign floral parts. If I understand correctly this talk will be something of a swan-song in that they are winding down their talking to groups.

So do yourself a favour, especially if you have not heard them before, and come along to enjoy their account of the French side of the High Pyrenees.

☉ Teyl de Bordes ran for many years a walled garden nursery at Lilliesleaf by Melrose which specialised in epimediums (or should that be epimedia?). He has now retired to Bridgelands by Selkirk. At some stage he spent time working at a nursery in Japan. In his talk in December he will take us through a Japanese floral year based on that experience. My recollection is that he has a pawky sense of humour so that his talk (which I confess I have heard before) will amuse and inform in good measure.

☉ January 14th is the date for our AGM. That (including the Convenor!) will be disposed of briskly to leave time for our annual Photo Competition (see below for details) and, just when you thought it safe to resume your diet, our belated Festive (*sic*) Social Evening.

☉ In February our very own Brian Davidson, about whom see below, will take us on a pictorial wander through his garden. Those who know about Brian's garden in Gatehouse might reasonably expect this to be subtitled 'or how I conquered the north face of the Eiger'. One thing Brian has in his garden is rock outcrop but he has lots more—a garden full of fine and interesting plants and prize-winning pots in what is surprisingly a rather small alpine house.

☉ Beryl McNaughton is another SRGC old hand. For many years she ran an alpine nursery in Edinburgh and then moved to Pencaitland in East Lothian. Latterly she has handed on the nursery business side to her son and daughter. That operates as Macplants out of Berrybank by Pencaitland. The nursery (and the McNaughtons) will be well known to frequenters of garden shows including Gardening Scotland. Beryl is to tell us about some high performance perennials at our March meeting. If that sounds as if it is straying a little from the alpine theme, so what? Remember alpiners are usually perennials and often (but not invariably) high performing! There will be plants from the nursery on sale at the talk.

☉ Another plant hunting talk to wind things up in April. Alan J Clark will tell us about the joys and tribulations of hunting for plants in China and Tibet. I for one, with an irrational dread of monsoon but an entirely rational detestation of leeches (based on experience) will be interested to discover the joy/tribulation ratio coming out of Alan's talk. Alan J. (there are apparently other nursery Alan Clarks) has a nursery specialising in rhododendron and hydrangea near Carlisle. Once more nursery plants will be on sale.

This seems to me to be in prospect a very interesting and enticing programme, for the arranging of which we have largely to thank our Programme Organiser Carolyn McHale. This is the first year that Carolyn has taken on this chore on our behalf.

May I say how much I am looking forward to welcoming members, old and new, to this series of talks at Threave.

A JOYOUS TALE TO TELL If my account of spring/summer events 2008 in issue 9 was rather downbeat, some might say (and some did!) downright pessimistic, then I have better news to relate here for this year. Matters got off to a great start with the resurrected Away Day in early May. Whether this was because it was held on a Thursday rather than on the usual Saturday is hard to say but it seems likely. Despite some initial difficulty with bus hire (efficiently sorted by Christine Wright) more than forty members and guests (including some from the Ayr Group) set off for a visit to two gardens and a nursery around Hexham. The weather was fine and consequently spirits were high throughout. First off we visited Ruth Hadden's Ryal Nursery just north of Carrbridge. Although small, it was well stocked with plants grown on site and there followed what might be called a buying frenzy. Next stop was a buffet lunch in the Club House, Tynegreen, Hexham, a very pleasant

setting, where a fine spread had been prepared for us.



In the afternoon we visited in turn the gardens of Alan Furness and John Richards both well-known alpine growers and showmen. Although they were gardens with very different 'feels' to them they both fascinated and informed. It would be hard for anyone to come away from either without having learned something about plants and their garden cultivation. Both owners very willingly made themselves available for questioning on plants and techniques. The crevice garden in Alan's garden went down a particular treat and not least with

those who had made the recent trek to the Czech Republic. We must thank most sincerely Alan and John and his wife for opening their gardens to us and the latter two especially for supplying welcome refreshments.

This Away Day was by any measure a great success. I have had a couple of letters of thanks from participants asking me to pass on their appreciation to the organisers. So Christine (Wright) and Judith (Broome) give yourselves a pat on the back.



A visit to Sheila Cameron's Walled Garden at Shambellie at the end of May was equally successful, although a smaller number attended. The garden itself is not an alpine garden but it was full of interesting, well-tended plants. What was most remarkable about it was in fact the story of Sheila's restoration of the garden from a derelict wilderness through sheer slog. It stands as a great credit to the dedication of a passionate gardener. Thank you Sheila for letting our Group share your 'secret' treasure.



Finally, the Group held three plant sales—at Kirkcudbright on 3rd May, Threave Garden on 28th June and Kirkcudbright Garden & Country Fair on 11th and 12th July. There were two very gratifying outcomes. Firstly we made a sizeable sum for Group funds; nearly £1000 pounds in total. Secondly far more members helped with manning the stalls and providing plants than ever before, due to our Secretary's efforts of encouragement not to say coercion. Thanks to all those who helped. Organising and manning these three

events was a major undertaking for the Committee and wider membership and it may be necessary to consider if we should wish to stage all three plant sales next year.

CONGRATULATIONS In contrast to the alpine plant growers of Lilliputian stature in the Group (I speak metaphorically and include myself) there is by any measure of growing skills a Brobdingnagian in the person of Brian Davidson. If this were in any doubt, and it isn't, it is nicely settled by the long list of show prizes he has scooped this growing/showing season.

At the combined AGS/SRGC Northumberland Show at Hexham in March, Brian was given the special 80th Anniversary Award of the AGS for a plant of *Shortia uniflora* 'Kantoense';

a photo of which may be viewed on page 54 of *The Rock Garden*, Part 123. As if that were not enough, his entry of *Rhododendron dendrocharis* ‘Glendoick Gem’ was given an Award of Merit by the Royal Horticultural Society.

Hang about! That’s not all. At the SRGC Glasgow Show in May he was awarded the prestigious Forrest Medal (highest SRGC annual show award) for a pot of *Trillium pusillum* var. *ozarkanum*. Go to www.srgc.org.uk/shows/forrest2009/glasgow.pdf for a splendid photo of both plant and grower. Finally this pot formed part of a three pan class which was also awarded the Henry Archibald Trophy.

Congratulations Brian and so say all of us!

GOOD NEWS, BAD NEWS FROM THE CONVENOR ☹️ Let’s start with the bad news then. By over-optimistic miscalculation I had reckoned that my constitutional stint of not more than six year’s service as Convenor would have expired at the next (January) AGM and on that basis have publicly announced my intention to demit then. In fact by then I shall have served only five membership years as Convenor. This does not include the year I spent (with others) setting up the Group so that I may truly be said to have served six years *in toto*, if not strictly constitutionally. The bad news is, therefore, that I could perfectly properly continue for another year as Group Convenor.

😊 And here is the good news. Notwithstanding my inability to count correctly I have decided to demit none the less. The reason I give is that I feel that I have ‘run out of steam’ and that some new energy and direction for the Group would be in its best interests. That does not mean that I plan to abandon the Group of course.

The upshot is that in the very few months before the AGM Group members need to put on their thinking caps in order to find a new Convenor. Personally it would be invidious for me to enter into detailed negotiations to choose a successor so I leave that to others. I have made all the remarks on the future of the Group that I feel I want and need to at the last AGM.

SNAPPY COMPETITION After the AGM in January 2010 there will be the usual photographic competition. Last year’s one was hotly con-tested by a large number of members and we wish to see even more entries this year.

Again there are to be two classes and the subjects of these are respectively

Class 1 *An Individual Rock Garden Plant*

Class 2 *Rock Garden Plants in Association*

so that there is plenty of scope for all photographers. ‘Rock garden plant’ is meant to include any plant which is usually associated with ‘rock gardening’. The plants are not required to be rare or difficult to grow. A colourful well-composed photo showing some artistic skill will appeal no matter what the plant subject.

This is a *democratic* competition; the print in each class with the highest votes cast by the membership audience wins for its taker a small but worthwhile prize. Thus there are no pernickety professional judges to intimidate entrants.

The **rules** will be the same as ever.

- All photographs must be colour prints in standard 6” X 4” (15cm x 10cm) format.
- Digitally reproduced photographs are permitted provided that they have not been excessively digitally enhanced; by which is meant altered by techniques

not available to amateur, non-digital photographers, for example, colour enhancement or 'air-brushing' and other editing *etc.*

- All entries must have been taken by the entrant; when and where does not matter.
- At most three photographs per entrant per class.
- Photographs should not have been previously entered in the Competition.
- Plant to be identified by visible labelling.
- Entrant not to be identifiable from the print; for example, prints not to be marked visibly with entrant's name *etc.* (For identification, they may be marked on the reverse.)

Simply bring your photographs along on the night; no need to pre-enter.

A GRAND MISCELLANY

☉ **SUBSCRIPTIONS** As reported above, the finances of the Group are in rude health by virtue of plant sales. Thus the Committee has decided that membership **subscription** for next session can be **held at the current rate**, *viz.*, £15.00 for two memberships at the same address and £10.00 for single membership.

Subscriptions, at these rates by cash or **cheques** made **payable to SWSRGG**, are due on 1st October next but **can be paid at the October and November meetings**.

☉ **EXPENSES CLAIMS** Would any member who has legitimate claim for expenses and outlays against the Group please submit it, preferably with supporting receipts, to the Treasurer well before the end of September so that she can rule off the books and begin preparation for auditing of the Financial Statement due at the AGM.

☉ **POTS WANTED** Members who have used plant pots which are surplus to their need might consider making them available to others by way of donation, especially for those who grow plants on for sale at the Group's plant sales. Bring them along (preferably cleaned) to any of the talks (a box will be provided for collection) and the Committee will see to their distribution to those needing them.

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE The present Management Committee members are as follows.

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN Ruth Hadden from Ryal Nursery sent me this e-mail soon after our visit

Several of your group took a Rodgersia for which I could not remember the species. It is *Rodgersia podophylla*.

Sae noo ya ken!

POSTSCRIPT A member has sent in this poem (which I have slightly abridged).

PLANTING TULIPS

I am come in from planting tulips
 More certain than a graveside priest
 That life may spring again
 From what is given back to earth.
 Life resurrected is but to man an unsure
 thing,
 A dream he dreams to keep the dark away.
 Yet I commit to earth this autumn day
 In sure and certain hope
 Of Spring's mysterious resurrection.
 The tulip's golden cup will show again in
 May
 To shed its fulgent light upon my way
 And fill my heart with joy and hope
 When other solace fails.

I am come in from planting tulips
 More hopeful than a midwife
 Handing new life to the world.
 The babe is born, the midwife gone
 But parents then must play their role
 To help it thrive and keep it strong.
 But I am old and may not see another
 Spring.
 What of my orphaned tulips then? It
 matters not!
 For this I know and can believe
 That tulips flash their scarlet to the skies
 On Turkish hills though no one sees.
 That fills my heart with joy and hope
 Against the dying of the day.

I am come in from planting tulips ...



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