

Wisley's Alpine Log

By Paul Cumbleton

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About a month ago the alpine team at Wisley got an opportunity to visit our sister garden at Harlow Carr in Harrogate, Yorkshire, in the north of England. A new alpine house was built there in 2009 but none of us had seen it yet. Much larger than the old, wooden house it replaced, the new aluminium house is a huge improvement. Here is the old house:



And this is the new house:



Inside, it is landscaped with rock, giving places where some areas are planted out and others are for plants in pots to be plunged.



In the two years since it was planted, the plants have certainly grown and look really happy in this environment:



Kaye Griffiths is responsible for this house and I thought she has done magnificently in producing an attractive display of real interest. Here she is in the house:



Up here in the cooler north of England, some plants grow much better than we can manage down at Wisley. I was particularly impressed with some of the Androsaces:





One or two other plants on display include this rather good *Draba longisiliqua*:



Erigeron aureus 'Canary Bird':



Armeria juniperifolia:



Cassiope 'Muirhead':



Outside, the house is surrounded by many troughs such as this one:



Another interesting feature was this one made with old roofing slates:



Behind the scenes, Kaye has one large service house where she grows the potted alpines:



Elsewhere in the garden at Harlow Carr, one thing that must be mentioned is the new Bramhill Learning Centre that has opened:



This innovative new centre is one of the UK's greenest buildings and will provide free education facilities for more than 10,000 children every year. It has been designed to be carbon neutral; in fact every element of this innovative building has been created with environmental sustainability and biodiversity in mind. In addition to construction using renewable and recycled materials, the two-storey s-shaped building incorporates numerous features to minimise energy consumption. These include sun pipes to channel natural light into rooms, a ground source heat pump, solar panels and a wind turbine.

The learning centre features:

- Three flexible teaching spaces, equipped to provide a range of learning experiences for children and adults
- The new Blundell Library where anyone can consult the latest publications on plants and gardening
- Outside is the Montague Burton Teaching Garden to help adults and children learn practical garden skills. There is also a wildlife pond and a living roof.

During our visit, I was privileged to be able to give a lecture in this building to Harlow Carr staff, showing them the construction of the new crevice garden at Wisley, describing also the history of crevice gardening and its benefits. Hopefully at some future date, the Harlow Carr staff will be able to pay a return visit to Wisley to see it for themselves.

On our return journey to Wisley, we made a detour to visit Slack Top Nursery (see <http://www.slacktopnurseries.co.uk/>). This specialist alpine nursery is run by Michael & Allison Mitchell and has a fabulous location 900m up in the Pennines above the popular tourist town of

Hebden Bridge. Well known for the several gold medals they have won at shows, Michael & Allison grow a wide range of alpines. Despite being extremely busy at the time, preparing for their display at the Harrogate show, they made time to make us feel extremely welcome and we were able to acquire some fine plants for the crevice garden back at Wisley. I can recommend anyone to pay them a visit if you are looking for some plants.

Our trip was well worth while and we were really impressed with the new alpine house. If you are able to go and see it for yourself I'm sure you will not be disappointed. I will finish with a picture of our team inside the new glasshouse:



Back row, left to right: Lucie Rudnicka, Annette Dalton, Anita Drury, Chris Allan

Front row, left to right: Kathryn Hart, myself (Paul Cumbleton) and Chloe Wells

If you would like to visit Harlow Carr, more information can be found on the RHS website at:

<http://www.rhs.org.uk/Gardens/Harlow-Carr>