

International Rock Gardener



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May 2013



For the first time since the inception of the IRG, your editorial team came together in one place in early May, in the Czech Republic. This happy reunion came about at the Second Czech International Rock Garden Conference in Tábor. This proved a most successful gathering of over 100 international rock gardeners – with delegates, nearly all members of the Scottish Rock Garden Club and also eager SRGC Forumists, coming from twenty countries to spend time in discussion of alpine plants and later, to enjoy tours of many fine Czech gardens. The event must be recorded as one of the best meetings of rock gardeners for many years!



The IRG Team: J.Ian Young, Zdeněk Zvolánek and Margaret Young

The thorough preparation and attention to detail of the conference and tours by the organising team of, in alphabetical order, Petr Diviš, Lenka and Vojtěch Holubec, Ludmila and Jiří Papoušek and Luděk and Zdeněk Zvolánek, meant that every need and wish of those attending were satisfied. Such minute attention to detail, particularly in the matter of plant phytosanitary certificate provision and even packing materials and expedited shipping of plants bought ensured that even Canadian and USA members were able to indulge in some exciting plant-based retail therapy. Of course the Australian and New Zealand visitors had to confine themselves to seed for their purchases but even they were impressed by the efforts made by the Czech Team to enable so many of those attending to take full advantage of the plants available for sale.



There was a wide range of talks and workshops at the conference, which was held at the Hotel Dvořák in Tábor, the very attractive medieval county town of Southern Bohemia. The programme was opened by Anton Edwards, the editor of the twice yearly SRGC printed journal who gave a warm welcome to all participants and set the tone for a warm and intensely friendly event.

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The IRG was well represented at the conference, with several contributions from all of the Editorial Team as well as from Jiří, Vojtěch, Vladimir Epiktetov, Michal Hoppel, Josef Jurášek, Peter Korn, Cyril Lafong, Martin Sheader, Dieter Zschummel, and the entertainment ranged from the “Vikings” (Martin Hajman and Kai Andersen) through a Scottish Night, to a super concert by the Marika Singers. The conference was truly a remarkable event, full of friendliness and excitement and it is the interaction of the delegates that stands out as the highlight.



The delegates assemble - photo Ian Christie



Too busy to sit down to dinner: the Czech Team - ZZ, Ludmila, Jiří, Petr, Luděk, Vojtěch and Lenka.



These are some coats of arms of the areas visited on the garden tours after the conference.

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There were opportunities to buy plants at the main part of the conference, in addition to the super talks and workshops. This proved very popular!



Ian Christie and Martin Hajman, Hannelotte Kindlund and Margaret Y., Jozef Lemmens, Diane Clement and Lesley Cox.



Rudi Weiss and Josef Jurášek, Christina Fryle, Susann Nilsson and Gergely Lunk, Gun-Britt Larsen and Ulla Hansson. Rock gardeners from Austria, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Kazakhstan, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Norway, Poland, Russia, Scotland, Sweden, Ukraine and the United States of America came together to enjoy this event.

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Above left: In the foreground, the Irish Belles - Kay McDowall, June Dougherty, Cilla Dodd and Dorothy Brown. Above right: Vladimir Epiktetov and Olga Bondareva. Below: Paying attention to a trough workshop.....



L to R : Martin and Anna-Liisa Sheader, Paul Spriggs from Victoria, British Columbia with ZZ and Bodil Larsen from Newfoundland – so there were representatives from East and West Canada!

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It is impossible to show photos of all the participants here, so please have a look at [Forum thread](#) where many more pictures of people, places, gardens and comments on the events are to be found.



Following the conference, the caravan of happy travellers moved on to a round of garden visits when we were based in the Hotel Academic in the town of Roztoky. During this time the Czech Team was increased by extra members of the Papoušek family, that most charming flock of “Alpine Parrots” when Lucy and Katy helped out as tour guides. Both Petr Diviš and Jiří Papoušek live in Roztoky, so I will begin with some photos of their gardens.

Part of the Papoušek rock garden:



This shows the newly built tufa wall which runs the whole length of the Papoušek house – I am sure there are staff at Botanic Gardens who would envy this construction!



Jiří and Ludmila



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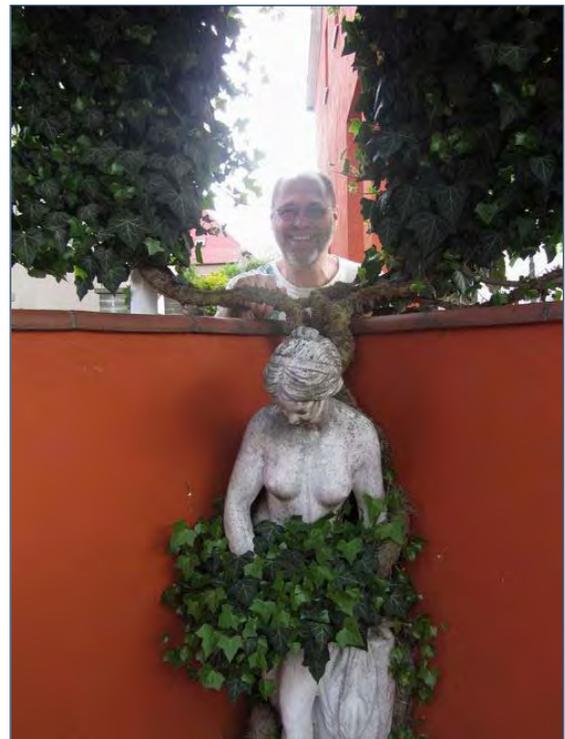
Views in the Papoušek garden



An almost full flock of 'Alpine Parrots'..... only Vaclav is missing.

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The rock work in Petr's garden uses silver grey granite, which made the Aberdeen visitors feel very much at home....



Over five days we visited the gardens of Milan Odvárka in Zdešov; Miroslav Staněk in Sedlčany; Václav Vostřák in Chyšky; Jiří Bartůněk in Záhoří u Písku; Jiří Sládek in Malý Chlumeč; Jiří Pospíšil in Dobřichovice; Zdeněk Zvolánek in Karlík; Martin Brejník in Černošice; Stanislav Čepička in Radotín; Milan Halada in Praha; Jiří Papoušek and Petr Diviš, both in Roztoky; Vojtěch Holubec in Praha-Suchdol; Ota Vlasák in Bořanovice; Jiří Balatka in Všejanya as well as the [zahrada Trója](#) and the May Show of the Prague Rock Garden Club, in Charles Square, Prague.

It was an intensive programme of visits, covering hundreds of kilometres of travel and great appreciation was expressed to all the garden owners who so cheerfully tolerated so many bus loads of visitors.

The Czechs are famous for their extensive and artistic use of rock in their gardens and this was a feature of all those visited. It was most instructive to see, as we drove around, the extraordinary natural rock formations to be found locally, which find their echo in the rock work of so many crevice gardens, in spite of this style being one which is often accused of having no natural counterpart.

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Some gardens included in the tours had also been visited after the first Czech conference in 2007 and those who had attended that event, in Beroun, were anxious to see what change there might have been in the intervening years.

Other gardens were new to us all and it was noteworthy to see how much had been achieved in some very fresh gardens by their enthusiastic and knowledgeable owners. The health and vigour of many plants showed only too clearly the difference in growing conditions between some of the warmer Czech areas and the prevailing climate here in the UK! Other visitors enjoy more similar climates to the gardens we saw and were especially encouraged to try some new techniques.



Above: Cilla Dodd, ZZ, garden owner Milan Odvárka and Tim Ingram
Below: visitors in single file and buying plants in the Odvárka garden in Zdešov



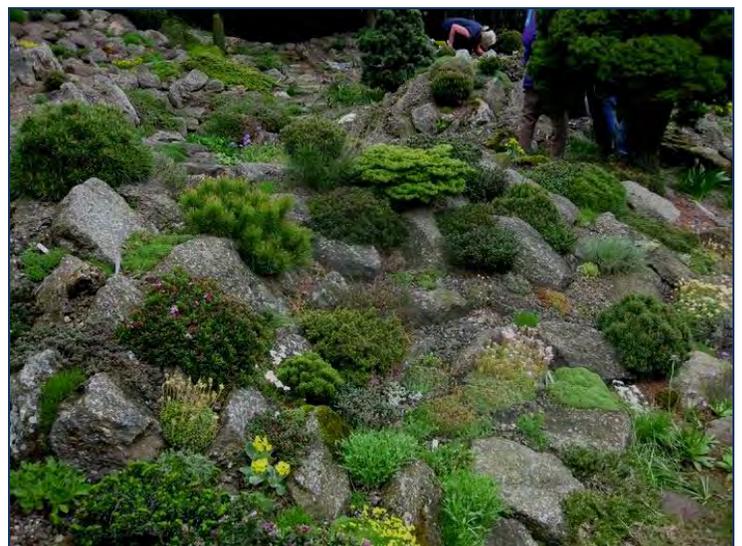
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Now to the garden of Vladimir Staněk in Sedlčany.....



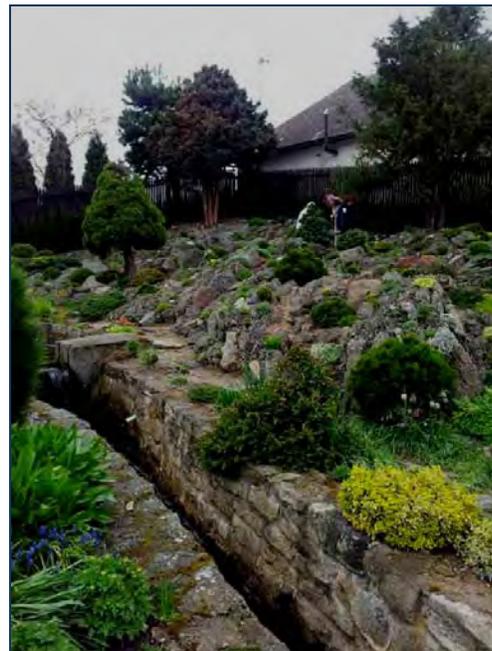
Gentiana in one of Vladimir Staněk's troughs

In the garden of Václav Vostřák in Chyšky with ZZ, Václav and his wife, Margaret and Anton Edwards



This garden also had many “witches’ broom” conifers – another favourite of Czech growers which were often shown grown as grafts on tall stems which tended to give a distinct lollipop look to some.

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Above: More of the Vostřák garden.



Now to visit Záhoří u Písku - as well as a more conventional rock garden around the house, (above) Jiří Bartůněk also had a table top planting. Bartůněk garden photos by Lesley Cox

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The outdoor table-top garden of Jiří Bartůněk



Petr Diviš and Milena Bucek



View from the garden

Our group was divided into three sections, each travelling in a coach from garden to garden. There were one or two cases of a bus getting slightly lost for a short while but speaking for our group, in “our green bus”, we seemed to travel effortlessly around the country with our very expert and charming young driver, who told us that he just loved driving - it was more his hobby than work! We rather thought this summed up the attitude of many of us to our garden labours, even the professional horticulturalists among us.

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On to Malý Chlumeč to see the garden of Jiří Sládek, with rhododendrons, troughs - and more.



Photos of the Jiří Sládek garden are by J. Ian Young

We had heavy rain in the garden of Jiří Pospíšil in Dobřichovice but his welcome was as warm as any other we encountered.



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Part of the Pospíšil rock garden

On the same day, but in better weather, we went to Černošice. Here we saw a triumph of rock work, made by one young man who must have the strength of an ox, Martin Brejník. Not only was there massive rock constructions but Martin had very neatly tied in the paths in the same vein.



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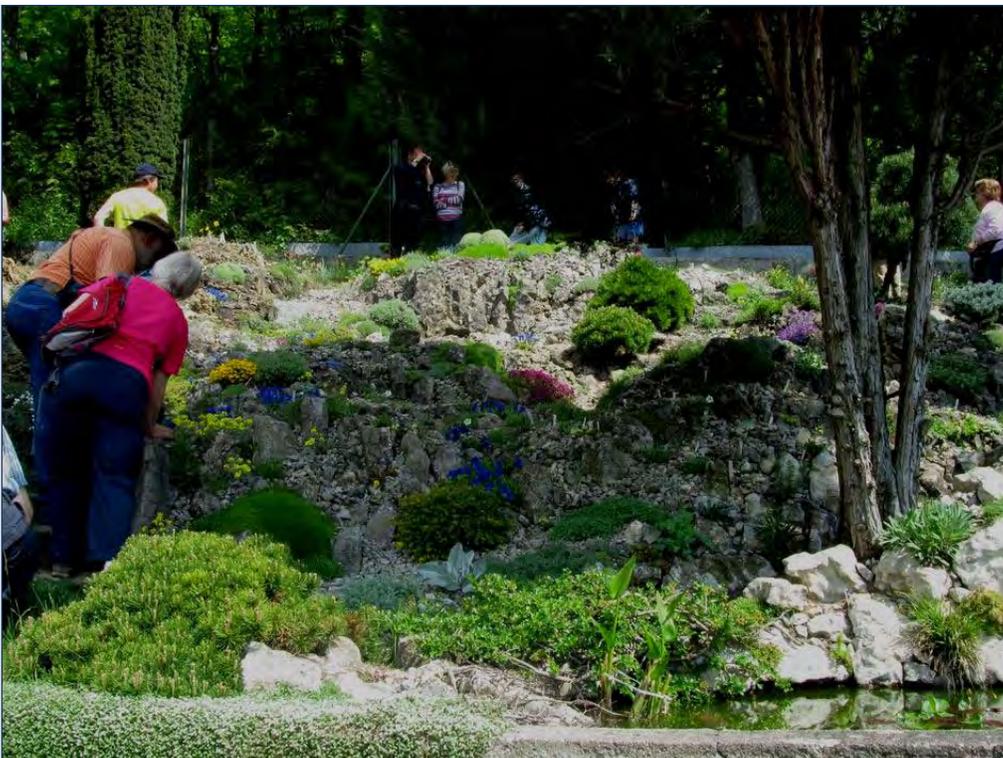


Martin is a modest young man but he seemed to enjoy our admiration of his efforts in building what is already a good garden - and he is not yet finished - he has many more plans for the future. It was clear that here, as in other gardens the plants are thriving in their rocky outcrops and crevices. The range of plants used in all was something of a catalogue of "classic" alpine plants - often plants that we visitors could only grow in an alpine house or, perhaps, not at all.

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Another view of Martin B's garden, with SRGC President Carol Bainbridge in the centre background



Stanislav Čepička with ZZ

This garden in Radotin was on a steep site and used every single inch of space for planting. The trees were really needed to give shade.

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Stanislav told us that this large patch of *Gentiana acaulis* had been twice the size, before he made some changes to the rock work. Since we were breathless at the beauty of it now, we could only imagine how wonderful it had been previously. As we walked to an impromptu visit to another garden nearby we were stopped in our tracks by a magnificent display of *Paeonia tenuifolia* growing, in the way we might expect of oriental poppies. I was quite taken aback by the number and quality of these flowers, which just will not thrive in our garden.



Paeonia tenuifolia – a magnificent display, simply seen “in passing”

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The paeony surprise was seen en route to see a very newly made rock garden - constructed by Tomas with very red sandstone. This garden, created by a professional photographer, shows great promise.



Milan Halada, a name familiar to readers of the IRG, gardens in a little quarry - a very sheltered site which can get very hot in summer.



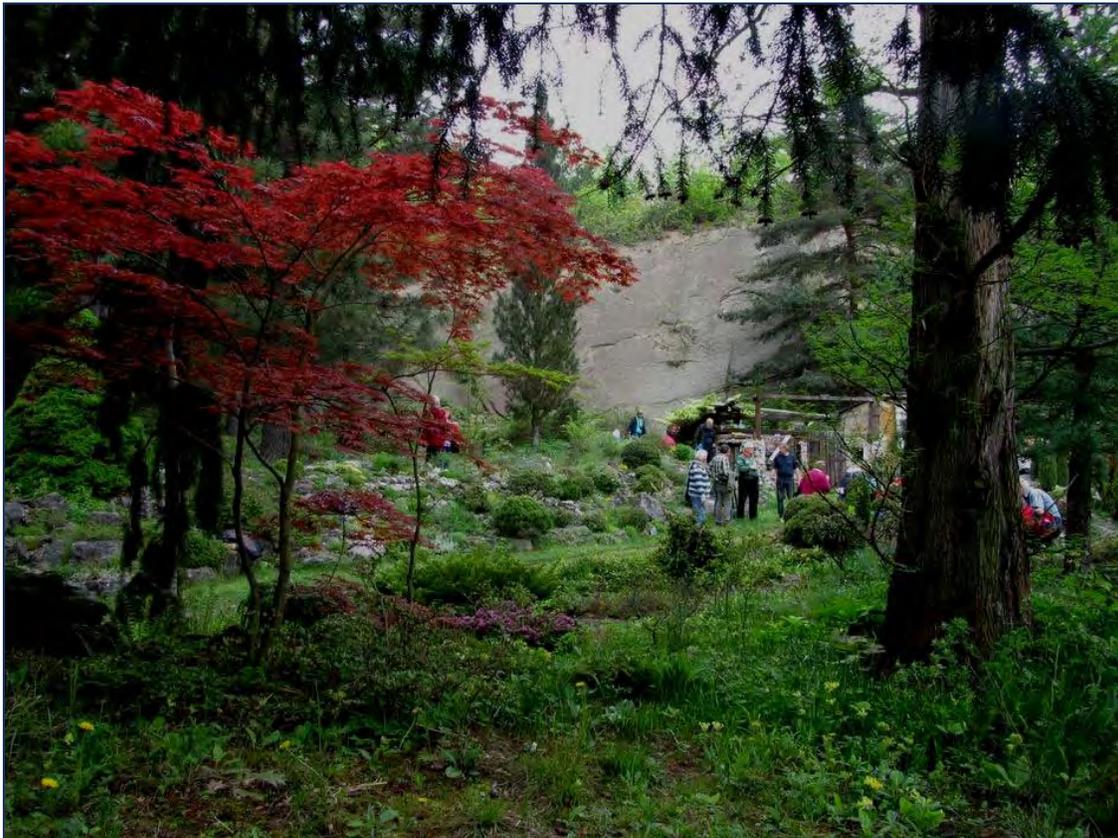
Above: folded rock layers – these occur in large areas around Prague, colonised by *Alyssum* – this was described by Fermi de Sousa as an “*Alyssum Wonderland*” (left)



Below: Milan Halada has planted this shady, “wavy” rock face with *Ramonda* and *Haberlea*.



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In the quarry garden of Milan Halada

www.srgc.net



The garden of Mr and Mrs Jiří Balatka which had the atmosphere of an enchanted fairy forest.

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Jiří Balatka has another hobby of grafting witches' broom conifers and we were all happy to have the chance to see and purchase these. He is clearly very skilled and committed to growing these plants. He has even planted grafted conifers on the road verges around his house to adorn the area.



Home of the witches' broom

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Ota Vlasák, seen with a stick in the photo below, had only recently come home from hospital when he generously welcomed us to his Bořanovice garden. This established garden was both aesthetically constructed and well planted. We viewed it in warm sunshine which made it even more appealing.



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Above: Three Canadians - Diane Whitehead, Janice Currie and Bodil Larsen. Photo L.Cox
Below: Visitors swarm over the Vostřák garden – so much to see and such pleasure to share.



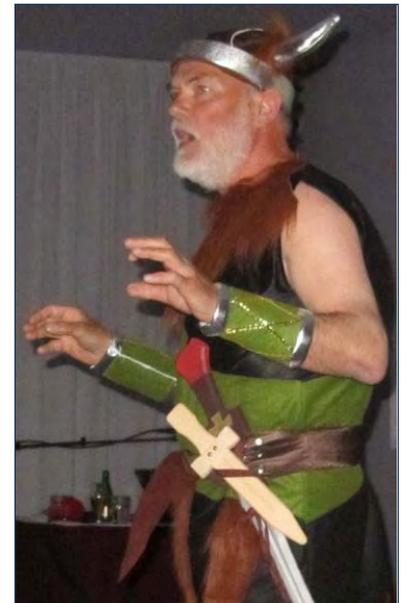
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The programme of talks and workshops at the conference was varied and the garden tours delightful and many had extraordinary rock creations, testament to the hard work of the owners, to house the plants, which all seemed to be thriving.

The conference venue at Tábtor was ideal with the advantage of the picturesque historic setting of the old town. We were entertained with wonderful music. [Marika Singers](#), ably conducted by Mária Divišová, the wife of Peter Diviš, provided a real treat, singing in several languages to the utter delight of the audience. This musical interlude was a novel addition to the conference and very much appreciated.



Then, on our last evening in Roztoky, Mária came herself to sing to us – it was a magical end to a spectacularly successful gathering of so many International Rock Gardeners.



L to R: Mária Divišová, Elke and Rudi Weiss with J. Ian Young, *Dryas octopetala*, Kai Andersen

So, what then were the **real** highlights of this fine event?

Surely it was the chance to enjoy an extended gathering with relaxed and friendly gardeners from so many countries – all relishing the company of other plant enthusiasts - to have time and space to meet

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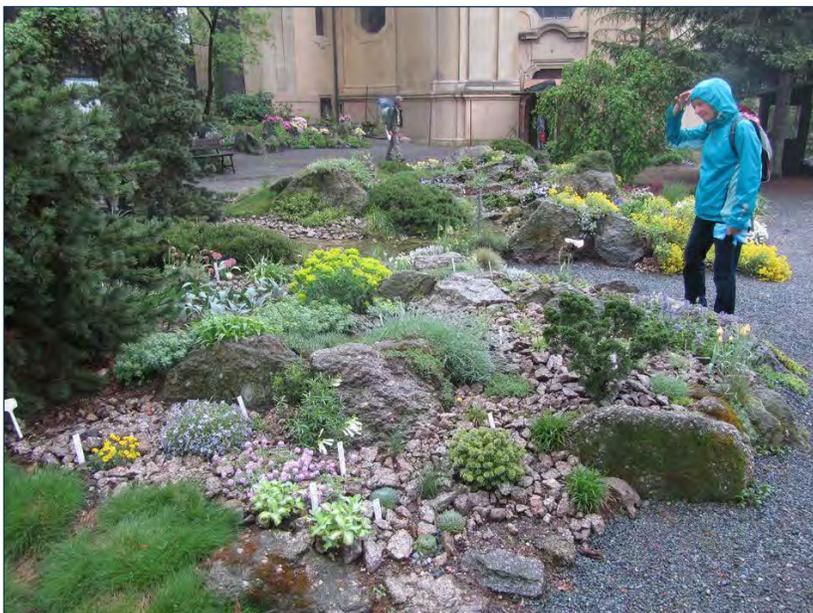
each-other in cheerful and fruitful accord – wonderful as the opportunities afforded by the internet are for international discussions (as evidenced by the tremendous traffic in the SRGC Forum) - there is no substitute for a face to face meeting of friends for an exchange of ideas and good companionship. If such a congress can also include a series of diverse gardens to examine and enjoy learning from the owners and provide some chances to buy plants to enrich our own spaces – which we might now have grand new plans to adapt – then so much the better.



Our Czech hosts not only fulfilled all our hopes for a full and inspiring schedule and itinerary, I hope they also feel they accomplished their ambitions for the experience.

This meeting was a wonderful event, very well arranged in every way and thoroughly enjoyed by us all. It was a fine example of the success such a coming together of rock gardeners can be, making our world seem a smaller and even friendlier place.

There is more to show of this gathering of rock gardeners – many more pictures will be posted in the [Forum](#).



I have had little chance to mention the visit to the the Botanická zahrada Trója (above left) and our very wet trip to the May Show of the Prague Rock Garden Club.

Left: Immediate Past President of SRGC, Liz Mills, enjoys the Prague Rock Garden show – in the pouring rain!

All photos JIY and MY, unless stated otherwise. Cover photo –Turkish *Iris* sp. M.Y.

Included in next month's IRG will be the garden of Vojtěch Holubec, and as well as my Report from the Beauty Slope.

Margaret Young