

International Rock Gardener

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For many SRGC members our interest is as much in “wildflowers” of the mountains and moorlands as in “true alpinists” so this month’s article by Ian McDonald is apt. The cover image is of the Scottish endemic, *Primula scotica* which also features in [this wet and windy video](#) from Sutherland in Northern Scotland. It is too long since we had an update from Zdeněk Zvolánek about the Beauty Slope – his steep garden in Karlík – this month we discover what is happening there and in some other Czech gardens.

Cover picture: *Primula scotica* in habitat, photo by J. Ian Young from [Bulb Log 26-15](#).

British “Alpinists”? A personal view of searching for British native upland plants by Ian MacDonald.

What is meant by the phrase “alpine plant”? Perhaps alpinists are strictly those plants found in the upland regions of the European countries. Would this mean that there are no true alpine plants in the British Isles? Yes and no.

Firstly, we are not a part of the Alpine region of Europe. Second, our flora does contain elements of the European Alpine Flora. If someone who has never visited Britain came to look at our upland plants he or she would probably be disappointed to find that we do not have meadows full of Gentians nor masses of brightly coloured flowers covering the hillsides. This is due to our position in the world and past climatic conditions. Being in the West of Europe and having three thousand miles of ocean to the West, we are open to strong winds.

Even in summer in the uplands, the weather can change from a warm day to one of freezing winds and near horizontal rain, in a matter of hours.

Right: **Alpine sow-thistle (*Cicerbita alpina*)**

In some winters we do not get the deep snow that protects alpine plants in the European Mountains. Any plants which are tall by nature such as **alpine sow-thistle (*Cicerbita alpina*)** are usually found in sheltered gullies. The majority of our upland plants are therefore short stemmed or ground hugging.



Upper limits of trees



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Above: **Cyphel (*Minuartia sedoides*)**
Below: **Moss campion (*Silene acaulis*)**



Among these are tiny gems such as **Moss campion (*Silene acaulis*)**, **Cyphel (*Minuartia sedoides*)**, **Rock speedwell (*Veronica fruticans*)**, **Tufted saxifrage (*Saxifraga cespitosa*)**, **Purple saxifrage (*S. oppositifolia*)**, **Starry saxifrage (*S. stellaris*)**, **Alpine saxifrage (*S. nivalis*)**, **Alpine fleabane**

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(*Erigeron borealis*), Alpine gentian (*Gentiana nivalis*), Dwarf cudweed (*Gnaphalium supinum*) and Diapensia (*Diapensia lapponica*).

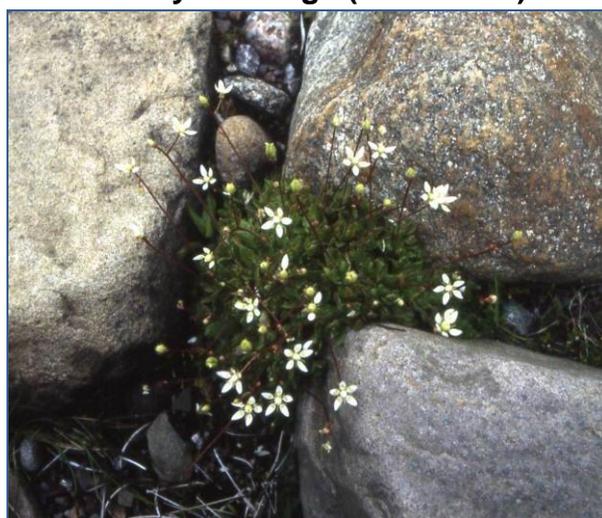


Rock speedwell (*Veronica fruticans*) Tufted saxifrage (*Saxifraga cespitosa*) photo John Edelsten

Purple saxifrage (*S. oppositifolia*)



Starry saxifrage (*S. stellaris*)



Alpine saxifrage (*S. nivalis*)

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Dwarf cudweed (*Gnaphalium supinum*)



Alpine gentian (*Gentiana nivalis*)



Alpine fleabane (*Erigeron borealis*)



Mountain sandwort (*Minuartia rubella*)



Diapensia (*Diapensia lapponica*)

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As well as the climate, our upland plants suffer from the grazing habit of sheep and/or deer in many areas. Where experimental exclusion zones have been installed to prevent grazing, taller species, such as the various grasses, tend to out-compete the shorter species. Sheep sometimes eat their way along narrow ledges, perhaps looking for a tastier meal. They find that they cannot turn round to retrace their steps and maybe in desperation, fall from the ledge. At a well-known vertical cliff near Ben Lawers I have nearly been struck by falling sheep on two occasions. Wearing a hard hat would have given no protection here. I suppose the nettle patches should have been a clue to past events. Narrow ledges that the sheep cannot access hold some of the more interesting species, such as **Mountain sandwort (*Minuartia rubella*)**, **Purple coltsfoot (*Homogyne alpina*)**, **Drooping saxifrage (*S. cernua*)** and the small ferns **Alpine woodsia (*Woodsia alpina*)** and **Oblong woodsia (*Woodsia ilvensis*)**.



Purple coltsfoot (*Homogyne alpina*)



Drooping saxifrage (*S. cernua*)



Oblong woodsia (*Woodsia ilvensis*)

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Alpine woodsia (*Woodsia alpina*)

Consulting a Geological map can be useful. Areas where there are limestone outcrops, usually contain interesting species. Some of the rarer plants can be found there as well as the more common, such as **Yellow saxifrage (*S. aizoides*)**, an indicator of limestone soils. Limestone breaks down fairly readily into nutrient containing soils. Orchids, such as **Dark red helleborine (*Epipactis atrorubens*)**, Broad leaved helleborine (*E. helleborine*), Early purple orchid (*Orchis mascula*) and Fragrant orchid (*Gymnadenia conopsea*) can be found. Another plant to be searched for is **Holly fern (*Polystichum lonchitis*)**.



Yellow saxifrage (*S. aizoides*)



Holly fern (*Polystichum lonchitis*)

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Left: Dark red helleborine (*Epipactis atrorubens*)



Above: Sibbaldia (*Sibbaldia procumbens*)

Below: *Gentiana nivalis*



Another rock type which breaks down to form a good soil is micaceous schist, sometimes containing small garnets. This is the area to search for species such as **Sibbaldia** (*Sibbaldia procumbens*), **Gentiana nivalis**, *Saxifraga cernua*, Mossy saxifrage (*S. hypnoides*), **Hairy stonecrop** (*Sedum villosum*), Alpine-forget-me-not (*Myosotis alpestris*) and *Erigeron borealis*.



Hairy stonecrop (*Sedum villosum*)



Alpine catchfly (*Lychnis alpina*)

Serpentine outcrops can support **Alpine catchfly** (*Lychnis alpina*). **Roseroot** (*Sedum roseum* syn. *Rhodiola rosea*) can be found in various locations from mountain ledges to coastal cliffs.

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Roseroot (*Sedum roseum* syn. *Rhodiola rosea*)



Mountain avens (*Dryas octopetala*) (above) favours limestone areas and can also be found in hills or near to sea levels in the north. My photo of the plant seems to be a double flowered form and was photographed in the wild.

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Plants of wet moorland are a diverse collection of species. Heather and bilberry will be known to most people. Less well known are **Dwarf cornel (*Cornus suecica*)**, **Alpine saw-wort (*Saussurea alpina*)**, always seen by me along water courses which are sometimes out of sight), **Cloudberry (*Rubus chamaemorus*)**, **Grass of Parnassus (*Parnassia palustris*)**, **Mountain pansy (*Viola lutea*)** which can be either yellow or blue, **Alpine meadow rue (*Thalictrum alpinum*)** and **Pale butterwort (*Pinguicula lusitanica*)**.



Above: Dwarf cornel (*Cornus suecica*)

Below: Alpine saw-wort (*Saussurea alpina*)



Mountain pansy (*Viola lutea*)



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Above: **Cloudberry (*Rubus chamaemorus*)**



Below: **Pale butterwort (*Pinguicula lusitanica*)**



Above left: **Grass of Parnassus (*Parnassia palustris*)** above centre: **Alpine meadow rue (*Thalictrum alpinum*)**

Several Lady's mantle species are found in the uplands, perhaps the best known is Alpine lady's-mantle (*Alchemilla alpina*). Another species, **Silver lady's-mantle (*Alchemilla conjuncta*)** can be seen at several sites. This is thought to have been introduced but it is not clear if this is so. Upland bogs contain plants capable of withstanding permanent waterlogging. Sphagnum mosses, for instance, as well as flowering plants. These include bladderworts, which trap tiny invertebrates in inflated bladders on their submerged leaves. **White beak sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*)** can be found along the margins of pools and streams. **Bog asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*)** is a plant familiar to many people. **Bog bean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*)** is a plant often seen with its cluster of white flowers above the water in pools.

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Silver lady's-mantle (*Alchemilla conjuncta*)



Bog asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*)

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Right: **Bog bean** (*Menyanthes trifoliata*)

Below: **White beak sedge** (*Rhynchospora alba*)



Above: **Pipewort** (*Eriocaulon aquaticum*)

Left: **Rannoch rush** (*Scheuchzeria palustris*)

I have found that the water in upland bogs is much warmer than the air temperature on cold summer days. Put your hand in the water yourself and you will be surprised at the temperature difference. Some rare native species are found in permanent pools. These include **Rannoch rush** (*Scheuchzeria palustris*) and **Pipewort** (*Eriocaulon aquaticum*). Marsh saxifrage (*S. hirculus*) is a plant adapted to wet mossy places in a few areas.



Some plants have evolved to cope with dry, stony areas, which are prone to strong winds. One such species is a dwarf shrub, **Trailing azalea** (*Loiseleuria procumbens*) (left). Along with dwarf mountain rushes it can be found in areas which are clothed in small stone chippings which are the result of many years of harsh weather conditions, reducing hard rocks to little more than "top dressing."

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Trees are usually confined to sheltered gorges. Two of the more hardy of these being Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) and Juniper (*Juniperus communis*). The harsh conditions of our uplands prevent most tree and shrub species attaining a height of more than a few inches. This gives a flora more in common with the arctic than the British Isles. Several species of willow, (*Salix sp.*) are found in mountain regions. Dwarf willow (*Salix herbacea*) is a prostrate plant creeping along cracks in the rocks. **Net-leaved willow (*S. reticulata*)** be seen trailing down from “hanging” gardens. **Woolly willow (*S. lanata*)** is an uncommon plant of some sheltered sites, as is Downy willow, (*S. lapponum*). A hybrid between these two species occurs where both parents grow.



Above: Net-leaved willow (*S. reticulata*) Below: Woolly willow (*S. lanata*)



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Other shrubs include Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Bog bilberry (*V. uliginosum*), Cowberry (*V. vitis-idaea*), **Bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*)** and Alpine bearberry (*A. alpinus*). The leaves of *A. alpinus* turn the area a bright red in autumn.

One group of plants often overlooked are the clubmosses. There are about eight species in Britain; most are found on upland moors. **Fir clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*)** is a compact plant resembling tiny conifers. **Stags-horn clubmoss (*Lycopodium clavatum*)** and **Interrupted clubmoss (*L. annotinum*)** are plants that scramble through other vegetation, such as heather. *L. clavatum* usually bears two "cones" while *L. annotinum* usually has a single "cone." **Lesser clubmoss (*Selaginella selaginoides*)** is a tiny plant usually to be found hiding under short grass. Two other species are **Alpine clubmoss (*Diphasiastrum alpinum*)**, also found among heather and other short plants and **Marsh clubmoss (*Lycopodiella inundata*)**, a plant of bare peat or wet sand.



Bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*)

Some sheltered wet mountain ledges are home to plants usually associated with lowland woods. Early purple orchid (*Orchis mascula*), Globe flower (*Trollius europaeus*), Wood vetch (*Vicia sylvatica*), Wood cranesbill (*Geranium sylvaticum*) **Melancholy thistle (*Cirsium heterophyllum*)** and Wood sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*) are just a few for instance. Also found on wet ledges are Round-leaved wintergreen (*Pyrola rotundifolia*), and **Alpine bistort (*Persicaria vivipara*)**.

In Granite areas I have found that stream sides and wet flushes are most likely to produce a greater variety of plant species. I have only seen Scottish saxifrage, *S. rivularis* among rocks on one small seasonal upland "flush" among scree. In the North-West much of the Geology consists of Lewisian Gneiss. The landscape in many areas looks grey and bare, with the vegetation seeming to contain heather and a few rushes and grasses. A read of the excellent book, 'Flora of Assynt', soon gives a better understanding of the region. [Ed.: this book is out of print but can be [read in full here](#).]

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Fir clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*)

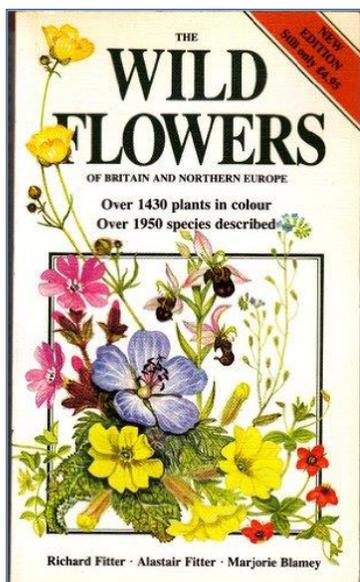
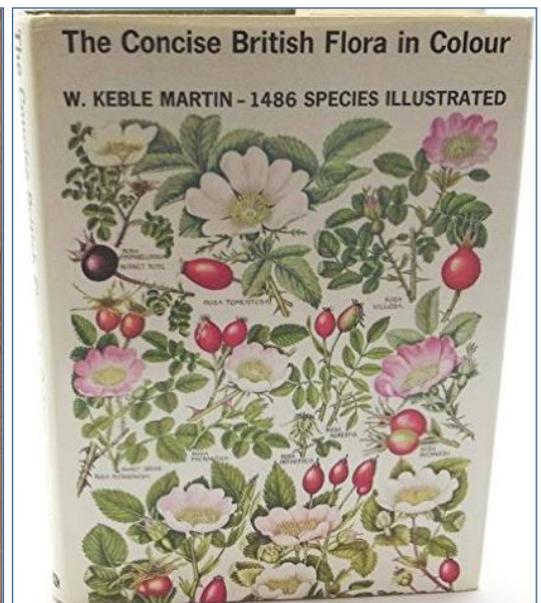
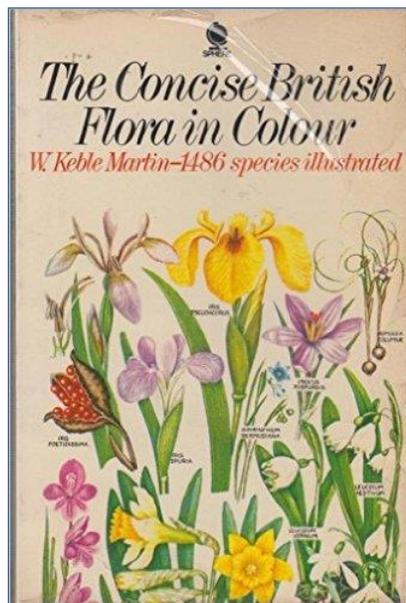


Interrupted clubmoss (*Lycopodium annotinum*)

Right: 1972 and 1974 cover pictures of Keble-Martin's book.

I first started photographing wild flowers in the early 1970s. In a standing position I took photos of two plants. When the slides came back I could not tell what the plants were. I decided I had to get down to their level in future. That is when I took more of an interest in our wild flowers. The two plants I photographed turned out to be Heath bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*) and Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*). The identification was due to a pocket edition of [W.](#)

[Keble Martin "The Concise British Flora in Colour" 1972 edition](#). I had this book for many years until it fell apart from use and being wet from field use. The drawback with it was the small illustrations and the descriptions which contained many Latin words. A language I have never understood.



My next book was [Fitter, Fitter and Blamey, "The Wild Flowers of Britain and Northern Europe"](#), 1980 edition. I found this most useful. I have marked with a dot each species I have photographed, in the book. A Botanist (or plant spotter) has to go where the plants are, so he or she could be in a lowland bog or a remote upland area, often on their own. There must be many places in the hills that are unexplored by botanists or anyone for that matter. Previously un-recorded species for the British Isles may still be out there. *Diapensia lapponica* was not added to the British List until 1951, when a bird watcher came across it. I have been told of another site for it some way from the original, by a reliable source. I was also informed by another person that a third site also exists. You never know what you might find, but it pays not to expect a new record every time you look. Going off the beaten track sometimes pays dividends, recording plants in an area where they have not been recorded before.

Left: Cover of Fitter, Fitter and Blamey book, 1985

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Stags-horn clubmoss (*Lycopodium clavatum*)



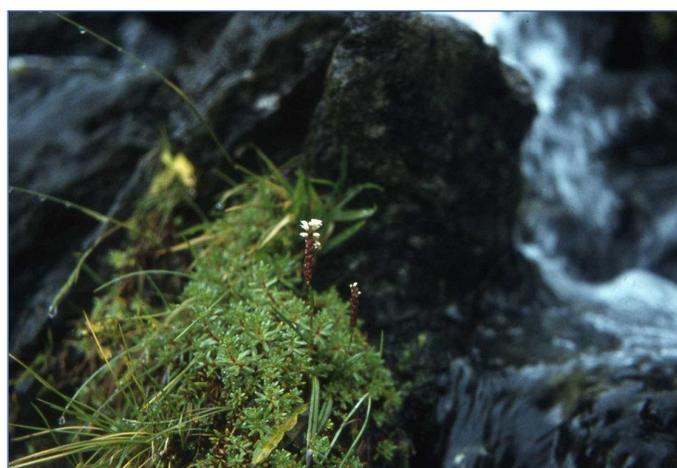
Left:
**Alpine clubmoss
(*Diphasiastrum
alpinum*)**



Right:
**Lesser clubmoss
(*Selaginella
selaginoides*)**



Left:
**Scottish
asphodel
(*Tofieldia
pusilla*)**



Right:
**Alpine
bistort
(*Persicaria
vivipara*)**



Melancholy thistle (*Cirsium heterophyllum*)

Care must be taken when in areas away from settlements. Twice I have been “lost” in thick cloud. The first time was when low clouds near Ben Lawers did not clear by mid-day as expected. I had made my way along the main path into the cloud. Losing the path where it went over rocks I found myself at a known ridge. When cresting the ridge I discovered that the cloud was moving at about fifty miles an hour. Several strange shapes appeared and I found myself in the company of sheep. Asking for directions I only received a look that said, serves you right for coming up here. The second time I was in cloud was with John Edelsten, a [Botanical Society of the British Isles \(BSBI\)](#) recorder. Luckily John had taken a bearing when we set off and he navigated back to the starting point. The BSBI produce an atlas of the British Plants every 20 years. The recording for the [2020 Atlas](#) is currently in progress.

On one occasion I decided to follow directions to a site on Ben Lui, where alpinists were known to grow. I was not told that in order to get to the south corrie I would have to cross a river. Luckily the water was not deep and I ended up with my boots full of water and wet socks. I emptied my boots and wrung the socks as dry as I could. The day was hot and I soon walked them dry. On another visit I walked across the river in Wellingtons and hid them on the other side. At another site I botanised for a while and could hear ravens calling from quite a distance away. Some time later, while I was eating a sandwich, they perched on a ledge above me and watched until I finished eating then they flew away. I have met a lot of people while in upland areas. Most are pleasant and pass the time of day. Some are less communicative and although you may be the only people in that area at the time, they ignore you as if you were not there. Perhaps they see others as an intrusion in “their” world? During an outing with John Edelsten we came across a group of people who were obviously looking for plants. The leader reminded me of a scout master leading a troupe. John recognised him and introduced us. The leader was [Clive Jermy](#), he co-wrote the BSBI guide to sedges. He asked me if we had come across a rare sedge. When I said I did not know the plant he quickly lost interest.

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Three leaved rush (*Juncus trifidis*)



Highland saxifrage (*S. rivularis*)

As well as finding plants myself, I have been told of sites for some of the rarer plants by other botanists. One of the sites for *Saxifraga cespitosa*, the photo of which was given to me by John Edelsten, is so remote that John and Eddy Bruce, another botanist, had to have help getting there. They were given a lift in the estate land rover, as far as it could take them. They then had a long walk and an overnight camp, to reach the site. *S. cespitosa* is one of the plants I have not seen in the wild. The site of blue heath was told to me by Mary McCallum Webster. Also seen at this site were small cranberry, (*Vaccinium microcarpum*), cloudberry and dwarf cornel.

Many years ago I paid a visit to the Hidden Glen, in Glencoe. Walking along the glen I became aware of a patch of snow at the end. Several interesting plants were seen. Among those were Parsley Fern (*Cryptogramma crispa*), alpine club-moss and fir club-moss. As I neared the snow I could see that it was near vertical. There seemed to be two parallel lines from the top of the snow-covered cliff, as if someone had skied down the high drop, about 200 ft. Coming closer I noticed people descending the cliff and the two lines were hand and foot holds. There was even a man with a collie dog coming down. I sat on a large rock among the snowfield to watch the people coming down, for quite some time. When I got back to the caravan site my face was bright red. I had not realised the strength of the sun reflected on the snow.

I would encourage anyone interested in Alpine plants to go and look for our own but be careful, especially if you are on your own. Do not do as I did once and lean back when on a wet ledge to get a better photo. The drop was only about five feet and I was not hurt. Some of the plants I have been shown were on the understanding that their locality is not passed on. Sometimes an x on a map is given, with the words "you can't miss it." Of course, the person who said that has a picture in their mind where the plant is and you don't.

I.McD.



Yellow oxytropis (*Oxytropis campestris*)



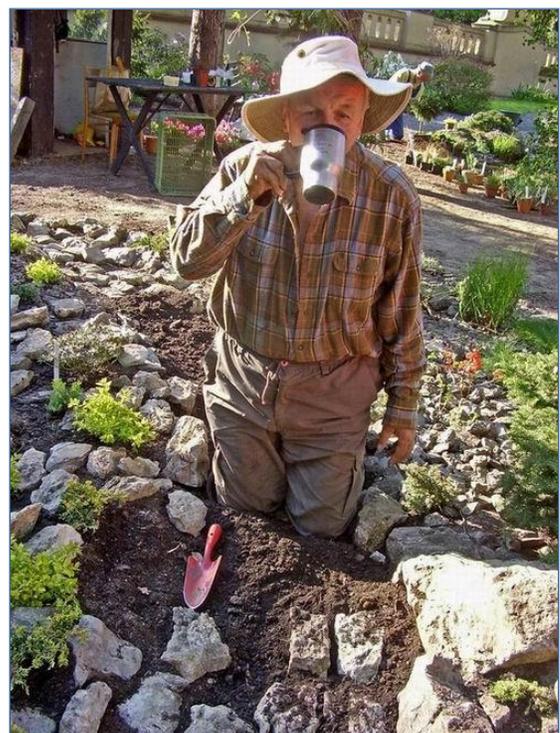
Blue heath (*Phyllodoce caerulea*)

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People have no idea that my rock garden is behind this castle Karlštejn in Czech Karst.

The shows of the KSP (Klub skalničkářů Praha) are always a busy time: it was very nice of our club committee to let me work at the pavement of the limestone outcrop for the show setup. The Prague May Show needs nearly 5 days work of at least a half a dozen rock gardeners. I was one of them for three days. Our plantsman Vojtěch Holubec worked with me one day but he was twice as productive as me. These photos are by Zdena Kosourová showing his work at limestone outcrop originally designed by Holubec and late Ota Vlasák. I did some reconstruction of its surrounding area.



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Slávek Křenek has made a report from the May KSP Show for the summer issue of Skalničky. Here is one of his photos – the Turkish *Iris sari* (left) which I grow outdoors in Karlík.



Viscaria nivalis (above) is a very distant alpine flower in Rodna Mts. in Romania. I have prepared an article for Prague club's journal Skalničky using a garden picture from František (Franc) Paznocht.

Dr. Vlastimil Pilous is the most productive author in journal Skalničky of the Prague rock garden club. I post here his photo of *Lilium lophophorum* (right).

I am charged with the duty to register the name of *Saxifraga burseriana* 'Manfred' Franc Paznocht brought it to Karel Lang and I had the chance to photograph this pretty clone from Mt. Hoch Obir which flowers 14 days later than other clones.



Its flowers have good size as you can see (left).



The cold spring is behind us now. This is *Cyclamen kuznetzowii* (right) from the Crimea, warming new snow in Standa Čepička's rock garden 8 km from my garden. Harry Jans visited

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recently and was as busy as ever with his camera. There was no competition between Harry Jans and ZZ. Harry takes 3 times more pictures of much better quality. Here (below) Zdena Kosourová made an illustration from the garden of Vlastimil Braun of the two in action. Both Harry and ZZ will be Speakers at next year's [Third Czech International Rock Garden Conference](#). Registration [opens 1st July 2016](#).



We know how to grow gentians in Moravia. Harry pictured this unnamed clone of *Gentiana clusii* (left).

Pulsatilla turczaninowii (below) photographed by Harry Jans at its collector Pavel Havlík's garden in Moravia.



The *Peonia sp.* above was photographed in a Chinese nursery by Harry Jans.



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I was pleased to be put in mind of Ron Beeston, who propagated 15 years ago this *Paeonia rockii* 'Joseph Rock' (the original plant from monastery). It flowers every year in our large rock garden.



Early spring is over but we can enjoy the highlights of *Saxifraga* cultivars in an old photograph. I am still surprised with the elegance of a **tufa raised bed** (below left) made 30 years ago by my friend Ron Beeston in Worcester.



There is a lack of *Paeonia clusii* (above right) in our rock gardens; it will not grow in the Beauty Slope. Inspiration is brought by Vlastimil Braun's picture, where we see the dwarf character of this plant.

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Vlastimil Braun and I will be writing an article for the IRG about the White Mts. in Crete. Vlastimil was there in spring 2016 and photographed the shocking blue enfant terrible - **Anchusa caespitosa** (left).

I have a deep reservation about Irises: they bloom for too short a time for me. This Moravian version (below left) is from the garden of Pavel Holík. It is **Iris reichenbachiana** collected in Prokletije Mts. Montenegro. **I.**

reichenbachiana is dwarf one, growing in Bulgaria at limestone rock ledges at 2000 m (below right). The photos are from Harry Jans.



here as the best **Edraianthus pilosulus** (above left) from Komovi Mts. Montenegro is flowering for the first time in Czechia. The picture is from Standa Čepička's travertine outcrop in full sun.

Hot days are here near Prague in Czech Karst and no rain for weeks. Standa Čepička waters his soft tufa (travertine) ridges regularly. It was difficult to photograph his subshrubby Turkish **Linum boissieri** (left) which came as seed from Mt. Ida's dolomitic limestone. Celebrations

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Under a bright blue sky (I call this state, Karlik´s Riviera) and the bottom of our Beauty Slope has fading ***Aethionema grandiflorum***, which flowered in cool spring for over one month. A German visitor made this picture of the ZZZ (Zdeněk and Zdeňka) having a high tea at the terrace.



The rose period of our garden is dropping more to yellow patches of ***Linum capitatum*** (below) before the *Moltkia* blues will take the spotlight for themselves.



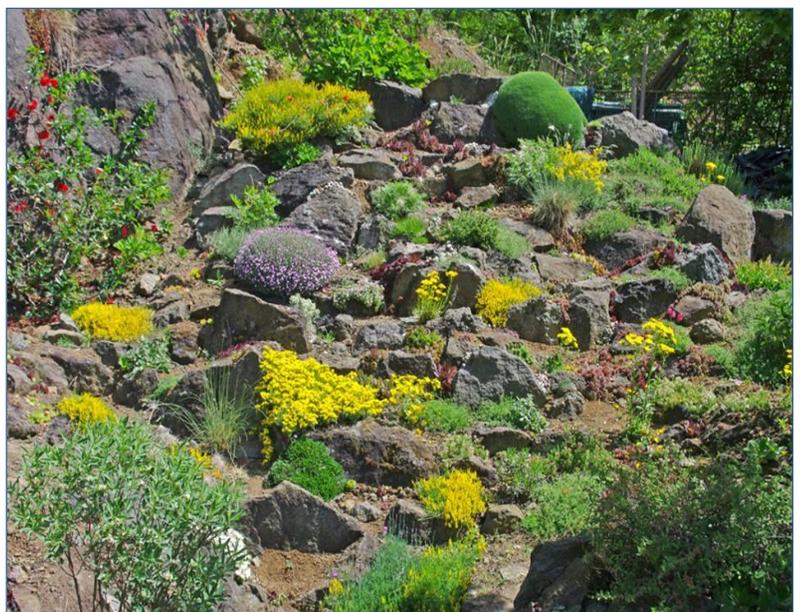
Showing dead plants is a sad new hobby of mine. Too many of them were tortured at the Beauty Slope in Czech Karst. ***Edraianthus vesovicii*** from Prokletije Mts near Albania was just only a promising youngster, now gone.



We got a pinch of an inch of rain and ***Globularia incanescens***, (left) the beauty from the marble hills above Carrara, was saved.

I was surprised with the health and vigour of yellow ***Genista lydia*** var. *lydia*,

which I collected above Lake Abant in Turkey. It is seen here (right) with a yellow ***Chamaecytisus*** (grown from my collected seeds). It is always a problem to form a crevice garden from irregular volcanic stones.

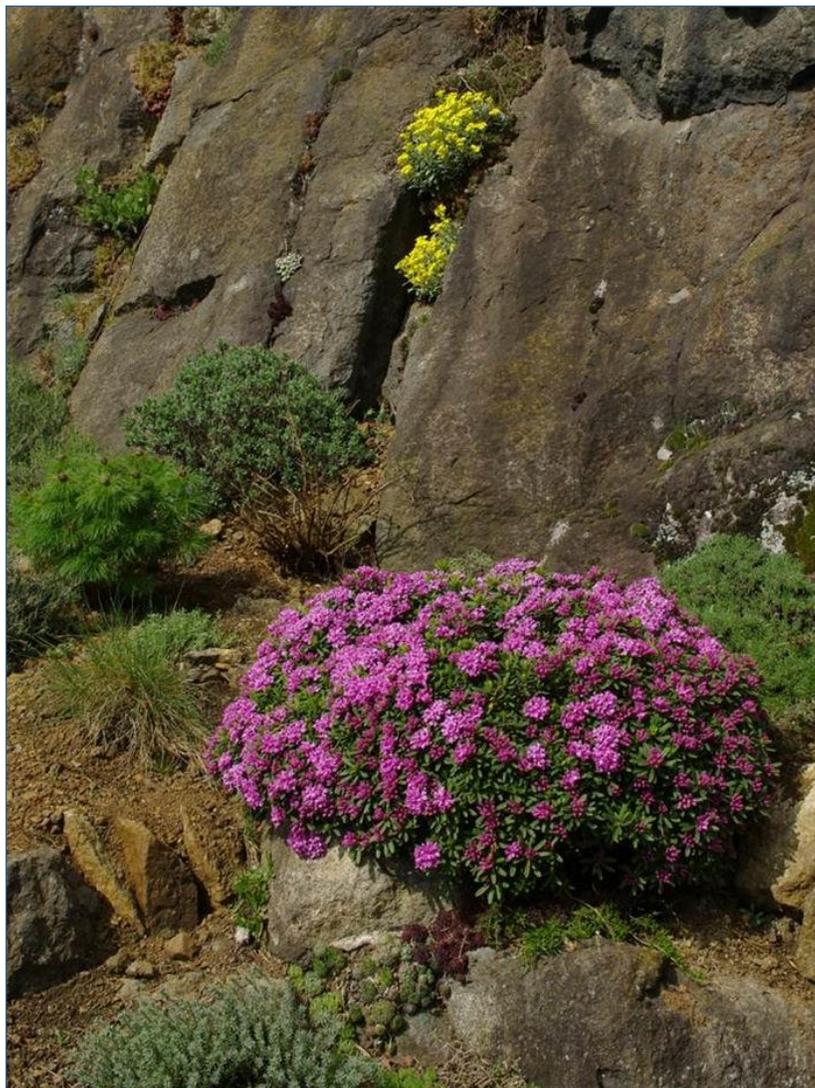


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Daphne cneorum is not designed for my steppe garden. Even worse is the behaviour of the diminutives called *D. cneorum* var. *pygmaea* both from France and Spain. They protest a few times and die for their pride. So I send my best wishes to **Kirsten Andersen** in Denmark for her introduction of ***Daphne cneorum pygmaea* 'Herskind Star'** (right) from cooler parts of Andorra. Luckily ***Daphne sericea*** (below) is much happier on the Beauty Slope!



We again had some very hot days which are suitable for some Turkish plants. Of interest is the first decent blooming of spiny ***Genista ? involucrata*** (below) from the Western Anatolia steppe, given to me by V. Staněk.



A very refreshing plant from dry dolomitic limestones of Spain is ***Echium albicans*** (below). The red is true.



A good dark form of ***Ramonda nathaliae*** (left) decided to look towards a wall and I was not able to photograph its face. Maybe next year it will be less shy and meet me face to face.

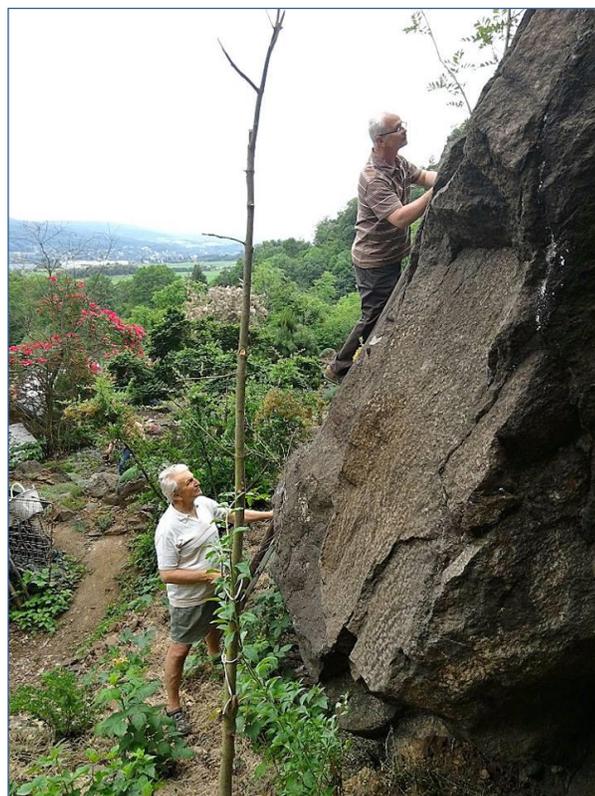


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My partner Zdena shows a good eye for photography. Here she enjoys our small northern crevice bed with *Aethionema pulchellum*, *Daphne cneorum* and *Chamaecytisus absinthoides*.

Good cooperation between KSP club's editor and chairman is seen in this picture by Zdena Kosourová. David Stádník cleans our diorite cliff above me at Beauty Slope in the Czech Karst.



Edraianthus niveus is a true alpine from Bosnia which I helped to introduce. It is not easy species in a hot spot.



Z.Z.