

International Rock Gardener

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The “merry month of May” has seen some better weather in the UK - though it continues to be more changeable than many would like - but that is the case for gardeners all over the world, is it not? Perhaps some virtual travel will cheer IRG readers? Canadian David Sellars takes us to Italy, we revel in the charms of a fine nursery with rock garden in Czechia and learn of a very young horticulturist from England with an interest in heathers. A mix we hope meets with approval and provides some inspiration.

Cover picture: Hawk Moth (*Macroglossum stellatarum*) feeding on the nectar of *Lilium pyrenaicum*, photo David Sellars.

Flora of the Puigmal Range, Eastern Pyrenees by [David Sellars](#)

An isolated range of scree-covered mountains lies south of the broad Cerdagne valley in the Eastern Pyrenees. The highest point is the rounded summit of Puigmal at 2910m. The range has a climate drier than the main chain of the Pyrenees and with its relative remoteness a unique flora has developed. Dry mountain climates often support a rich alpine flora. Competition from plants needing moister conditions is reduced, and specialized plants can find a happy ecological niche among the screes and shattered summits. Ridge walking is easier than in the more rugged high Pyrenees and the hills have more of the feel of the Highlands of Scotland although the summits are much higher.



Summit of Puigmal de Llo looking north across the Cerdagne Valley to the main chain of the Pyrenees.

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Though lying south of the main Pyrenean watershed divide, the Puigmal Range forms the border between France and Spain. Long parallel valleys penetrate the range from France in the north including Vallee d'Eyne, famous as a floral nature reserve. To the south, the mountains form a ring around the Val de Nuria. The Sanctuary of Nuria, at nearly 2000m can be reached easily by a rack railway, the Cremallera de Nuria.

Lilium pyrenaicum

We had only walked a few hundred metres into the Vallee d'Eyne when we came across our first splendid ***Lilium pyrenaicum***. It had multiple flowering stems and the beautiful yellow Turk's Cap flowers with red anthers were set off by the narrow shiny-green leaves. There were many plants beside the trail at around 1800m elevation. They seemed to prefer openings in lightly wooded areas that were fairly moist but well-drained. One enormous clump was being pollinated by two large Hummingbird hawk-moths, ***Macroglossum stellatarum*** (+ see cover photo).



Macroglossum stellatarum



Adonis pyrenaica

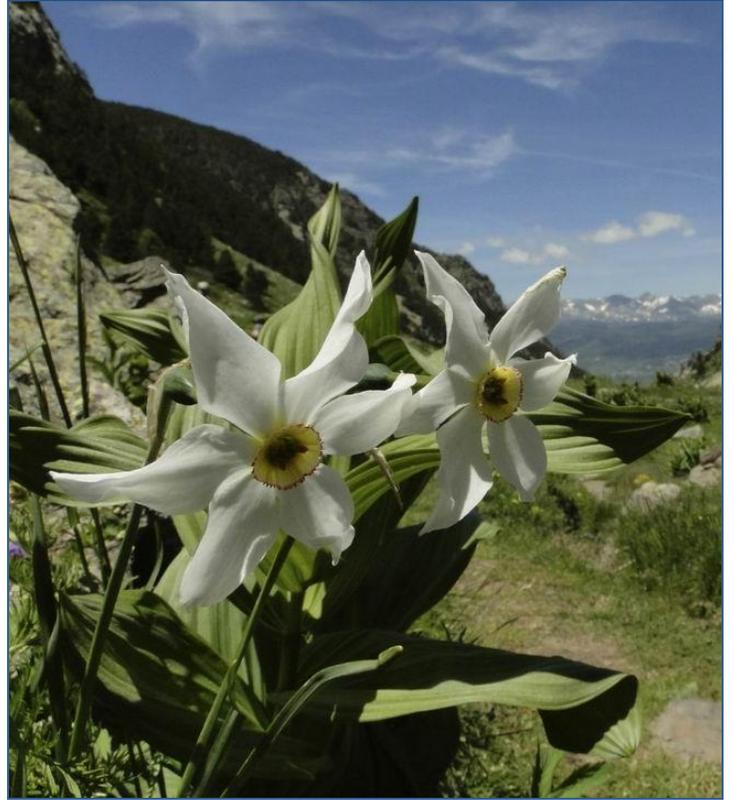
Higher up the valley we found the feathery foliage and bright yellow flowers of ***Adonis pyrenaica*** and some splendid ***Narcissus poeticus***. The mountains lay ahead and the distance to the high alpine areas was too far for the first day.



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Adonis pyrenaica



Narcissus poeticus



Viola diversifolia: This exquisite endemic has rounded pubescent leaves and prefers growing in blocky scree with fine moist scree at depth.

We found easier access to the alpine ridges from the abandoned French ski area of Err-Puigmal where a paved road leads to a parking lot at 2000m. A good trail leads to the mountain ridge above Val de Nuria and there were very fine plants of ***Viola diversifolia***, an endemic to the Eastern Pyrenees with exquisite foliage.

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Senecio leucophyllus

Another outstanding plant with velvety, silver, crinkled leaves was endemic yellow flowered **Senecio leucophyllus** which was scattered among the boulders.



Androsace laggeri in pink and white forms



Left: *Androsace laggeri* Alba

Right: *Ranunculus
parnassifolius*



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On the ridge, both pink and white forms of *Androsace laggeri* decorated the rock outcrops and there were many *Ranunculus parnassifolius* dispersed around the scree. With its huge pink-tinged flowers and remarkable foliage, Margaret and Henry Taylor describe the Nuria form of *Ranunculus parnassifolius* as one of the world's most attractive mountain flowers. We have seen this species at other locations in the Pyrenees but it has never achieved the glory of the Nuria form. It can be grown in the garden but it usually has only small white flowers. It can be found in the Puigmal Range above about 2400m and is quite widespread on the ridges and scree slopes above 2700m. It appears to prefer moist screes that are fine grained on open slopes. While the flowers and leaves often rest on coarse blocky scree, the roots are likely in moist fine scree at depth. Many of the alpine species in the Puigmal Range like similar habitats.



Ranunculus parnassifolius



The Spanish rack railway leading to the Nuria Sanctuary is an enjoyable ride up the canyon. As described in the AGS book by Margaret and Henry Taylor a number of excellent flower walks lead from the Sanctuary to points on the ridges encircling the head of the Val de Nuria.

[Reference: *Mountain Flower Walks: The Pyrenees and Picos de Europa* by Margaret and Henry Taylor publ. Alpine Garden Society. (ED.: sadly this is currently out of print.)]

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The Coma de l'Embrut west of the Sanctuary is a fine hike with areas of limestone habitat and a great variety of flowers. There is a small limestone canyon which is normally dry with the stream disappearing into a swallow hole about 0.5km above. It is worth walking up the base of the dry canyon where there is a superb range of flora including *Adonis pyrenaica*, *Daphne cneorum*, *Saxifraga pubescens*, *Saxifraga media* and *Androsace villosa*.



Saxifraga pubescens



Daphne cneorum



Androsace villosa

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Above the limestone area, the underlying geology is acidic and *Primula latifolia* and ***Primula integrifolia*** (left) can be found. In the grassy meadows to the right are *Gentiana pyrenaica* and *Gentiana alpina*. *Viola diversifolia* grows happily in the screes and cushions of ***Androsace vandellii*** (below) peek out from under the overhangs of small rock outcrops,



East of the Sanctuary is the Coma de Noucreus where *Ranunculus parnassifolius* grows on fine-grained moist scree slopes. The trail ascends scree at the head of the valley with good plants growing in the stony slope including fine compact forms of ***Alyssum serpyllifolium*** (below), nice shades of *Papaver alpina* and exquisite ***Iberis spathulata***.



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Iberis spathulata is another plant that enjoys a surface “mulch” of coarse blocky scree.



Linaria alpina on a broad summit ridge.

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The ridge crest can be gained at the Coll de Noucreus and it is worth exploring the easy surrounding terrain. Heading west to the easy summit of Pic de Noucreus there are rock gardens with very colourful *Linaria alpina* and *Erigeron uniflorus*. In a rocky northeast facing slope towards the Coll de Noufontons we found the best forms of *Ranunculus parnassifolius* together with yellow *Androsace vitaliana* and pure white *Hutchinsia alpina*.



Hutchinsia alpina



Erigeron uniflorus



The rounded summits of the Puigmal Range

With good access from both north and south and stunning flora, the Puigmal Range is well worth a visit. These are dry mountains so the shallow snowpack melts early in the spring. The best time to visit would normally be the second half of June but varies from year to year depending on the spring melt. More detailed route information and links to hiking videos can be found on [the Mountainflora website](http://theMountainflora.com).

D.S.

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ALPINES IN THE JUNGLE OF WITCHES' BROOMS by Zdeněk Zvolánek, photographs by Zdena Kosourová

During the last Czech Study Weekend a conifer expert, Vladimír Valenta, offered a donation of his plants for the permanent planting at the Prague Rock Garden Club's garden. Never having had a car, I asked the Paclts for transport to the Valenta's nursery which is located in Bělečko near Hradec Králové in Eastern Czechia (Czech Republic).

What we discovered there was a great surprise; we admired a very well designed ornamental garden including a crevice rock garden of the first division. My Moravian partner Zdena Kosourová provided the rich photographic documentary (no mean feat in the dull, thin light of an April day) so I decided to share our pleasure from the visit with our international readers.



The Valenta's home is a modern log cabin, appropriate in this jungle of the smallest conifers, grafted on trunks or canes of different height. The most important part of the house was a veranda for social drinking and eating with local lovers of witches' brooms, wines, spirits and unusual ornamental shrubs. There is a million dollar view, into a large amphitheatre with a medium sized pond and a collection of conifers and shrubs around slopes supported by elegant groups of palisades made from old railway sleepers. The whole theatre with a light reflecting pond, which was previously just a large hole after a sand quarry had been excavated, has romantic corners with expensive highly decorative limestone boulders. The work with wood, forming stairs and palisade walls, has the feeling of intelligent craft and I admired the ornamental framing of the woodwork with living woods in the shape of the grafted witches' brooms, mixing the tall, medium and the prostrate individuals.

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Veranda and pond



Above: Pond from other aspects

Below: Trough made from dug-out tree trunk.



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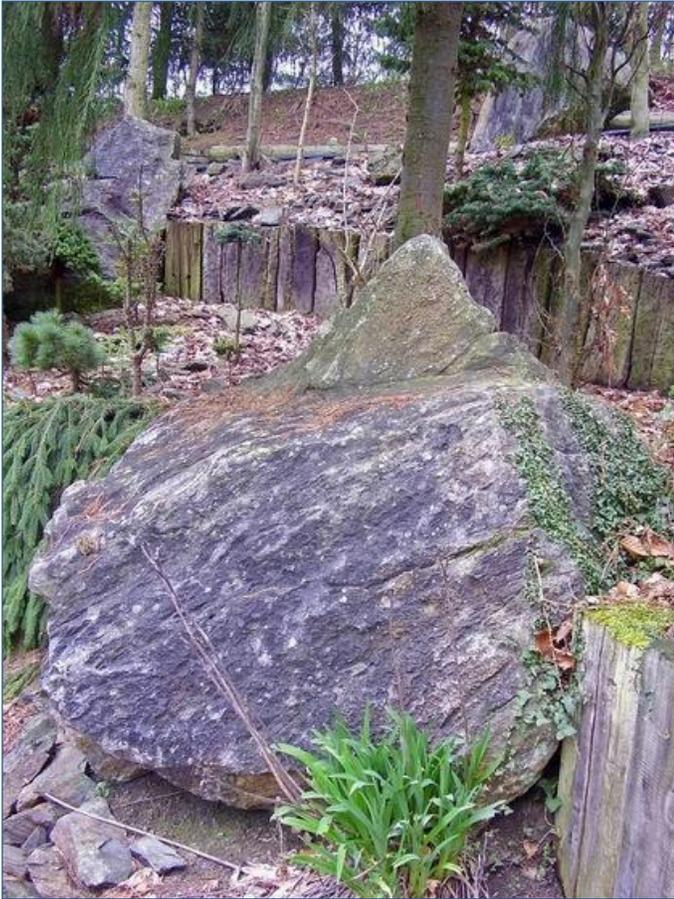


Dry, mossy waterfall.

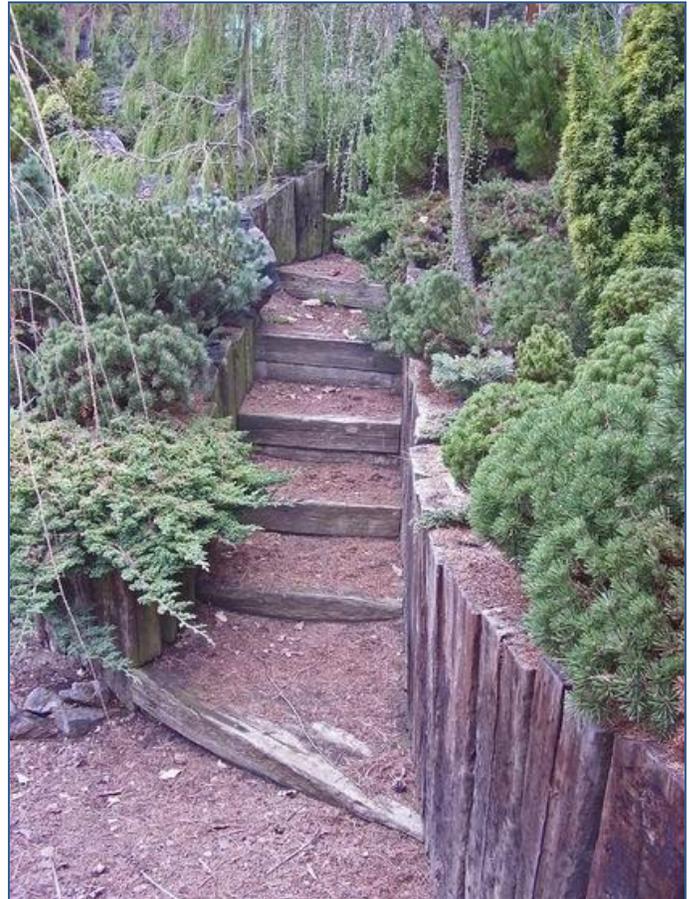


Dwarf spruces in a pine forest

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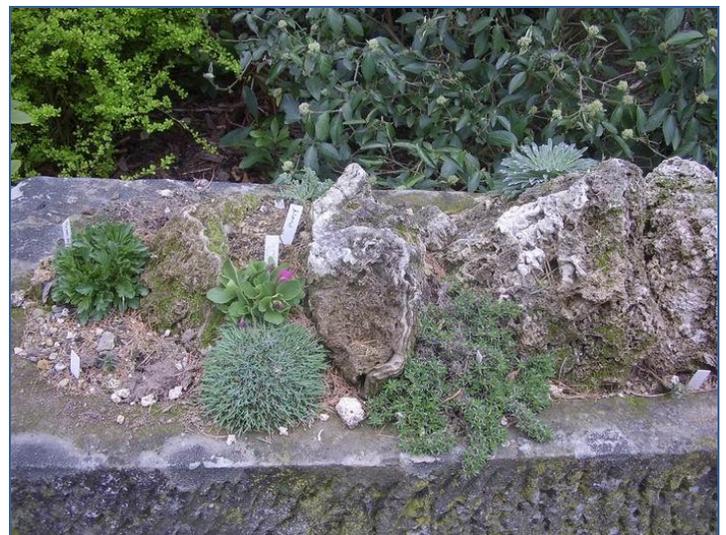
Giant boulder



Wooden steps and retaining wall

This semi-shaded area has during warm days a small cascade (miniature waterfall) centred on mossy stones. Also, closing the broken ends of a farmer's trough with stones and *Salix reticulata* showed a good sense for details.

It is a small arboretum of rare items waiting for skilful propagation by grafting branches of the stock plants. The perimeters of the collection have an artistic edging with antique granite troughs and a trough made from a large beech trees, halved lengthwise and carved out like a dugout canoe. The top parts of troughs have limestone or tufa stone arrangements and are planted with small *Daphnes* (often *D. arbuscula*), dwarf perennials and witches' brooms.



Tufa, with *Phlox* clone in granite trough and soft travertine in a precise stony trough.

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Broken end of trough with *Primula marginata*



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A couple of troughs standing on a patch of turf are quite elegant. I think it clever work to place a trough containing a group of fine *Primula allionii* to be sheltered by the overhang of the roof of the cabin.



Primula allionii given protection of the overhang of the cabin.



Saxifraga longifolia



Raised bed with tufa



White *Saxifraga marginata*



A raised bed using tufa boulders and walls built from heavy granite road curbs has a very promising future.

We admired the spider rosettes of *Saxifraga longifolia* and red inflorescences of *Saxifraga sempervivoides* or *S. federici-augusti* subsp. *grisebachii*.

[Ed. [This link](#) leads to the website of Mr Valenta and [this link](#) is to a video of his ornamental nursery.]

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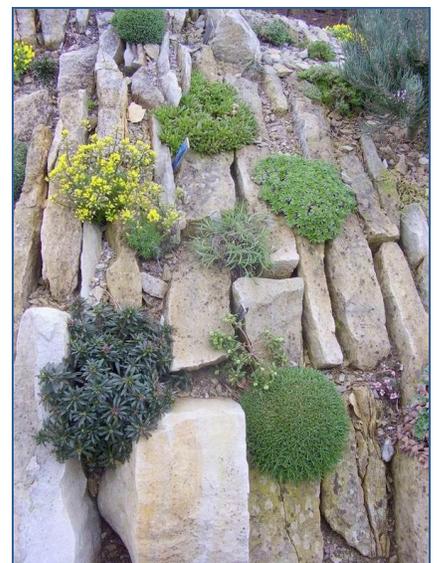
We saw the neat closing of a small broken stone trough for May blooming and another clever use of a broken pot.



Some witches' brooms are happy and healthy in a hole drilled deeply into tufa stones. Some of the conifer collections were in a natural arrangement, with a top-dressing of black shale. I was looking to select the collection of plants for the donation to the Prague KSP Garden so there was no time to write down the cultivar names of the many outstanding conifers. The nicely yellow pine *Pinus sylvestris* is here presented without its proper name.

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The biggest surprise to me was a large crevice garden with vertical angle of layers. It was built by Vladimír Valenta himself from a flat, soft kind of local beige chalk. Zdena made one picture showing the present friends (from the left): Zuzana Pacltová, Josef J. Halda, the author of the rock work Valenta, smoking a pipe and the unhappy ZZ - photographing without a charged battery in his camera. An unknown male lover of conifers stands at the right of the row.



Daphne x hendersonii, *Lewisia tweedyi*, *Vitaliana* and good drainage for *Primulas* and *Draba*

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One of the named conifers we obtained is the rare dwarf form of *Pinus monophylla*, the pine with only one needle in its “cluster”. I photographed it together with a 30 year old *Pinus parviflora* ‘Al Fordham’ before my Pentax camera collapsed.

The stony outcrop has proper returns of layers back to terrain. My only protest would be against the bottom of the construction made from horizontal layers. Some stones are irregular in a regular layer but they are not too obvious (an example of good crafting). It is a relatively young crevice garden, plants are slowly growing in a lean substrate and there are plenty of unfilled crevices waiting for miniature plants or closing with stony slivers or closing (top dressing) with marl grit. The whole crevice bed has a broad U shape with fine access to high ridges from all around. The U-shaped design of this crevice garden offer all possible aspects: the basic morning, noon and evening sunshine areas for baking or protecting the body of alpiners.



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A good strategy is shown in this rock garden in not planting species which will cover larger areas and taller perennials are also avoided. Cushion plant like golden yellow *Vitaliana (Androsace) primuliflora forma praetutiana* are preferred. This rule of small plants for small rock garden is kept with the most attractive genus for garden: *Daphne*. Vladimír Valenta planted many clones of *Daphne x hendersonii* including white clone 'Marion White', forms of Italian *Daphne petraea*, *Daphne cneorum* var. *pygmaea*, *Daphne arbuscula* etc. Great help with Chinese yellow flowering *Daphnes* came from Josef J. Halda who gives the owner two forms of *Daphne calcicola* and *Daphne modesta*. The golden hands and green fingers of Mr. Valenta which are making quick miracles with grafting witches' brooms and other conifers are the best investment in propagating great assortment of *Daphnes*.

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Daphne modesta



Daphne calcicola, dark form



The owner of this great nursery, Vladimír Valenta, writes:

It was a long journey, it took 35 years. It started when I was choosing plants for my first small garden. The range of the wood species on the market wasn't sufficient for me at that time. Everything was tall and it wasn't the "it" until my friend Michal (big boss nowadays) showed me first pine *Pinus heldreichii* 'Schmidtii'. I was bewitched by the mysterious charm of the Witches' brooms. They became my lifelong love, passion and unrecognized adventure.

The beginning was hard. I got to know people from Witches' brooms, slowly at the beginning and a little bit faster afterwards. These people were the same fans as I was. Even I don't have many of the plants from this time anymore; I have a lot of good friends, who are verified by the years. I accepted an offer from the nursery Skolka Litomyšl and became a manager in the garden centre in Hradec Kralove in 1992. It was a great experience. It showed me that I don't want to follow the way of common range of wood species. I want to do the Witches' brooms.

That is why I started to build my dream on the top of the hill surrounded by woods. It is a small, compact company Ornamental plant nursery (Okrasné školky Valenta), specialized exclusively on Witches' brooms, conifers and deciduous trees. We travel with the WB fans to different parts of Europe to find new Witches' broom species every year. And we graft and graft at home afterwards. We are

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working with more and more difficult species. That is why we offer around 100 new species every year, from our friends or family, especially our son Jan, who has a good eye for new discoveries. We got to know and became friends with the world experts in this field over the years, among which we rightly belong as well nowadays. They assured me once more that my journey is not easy, but it is the right one. There are around 100000 plants in our lining-out nursery now. We graft 15000 – 20000 pieces of Witches' broom in 1000 species every year. There are around **3000 mother plants** and species in my area.

The collectors will find new species, the nicely designed garden and green area creators can find unbelievable amount of impressive cultivars; the common admirers and garden owners will gain inspiration and also find a plant, which will suit them best. You are warmly welcomed to our paradise of Witches' broom, harmony of shapes and colours.”



My friend, the alpine gardener Oldřich Maixner, told me that all the design of arboretum, rock garden and the realization of the project is work of Vladimír Valenta himself. It is a miracle on Earth because the entire nursery is run with three persons only, the Valentas and one lady gardener. Mrs Valenta is a heroine, permanently patient, clever and with quick hands. Mr. Valenta is slower in walking running old fashioned bicycle through the nursery, having three pairs of very rare red birds and two big female Tibetan Mastiff dogs.

To be able to keep beautiful rock garden and arboretum together with large nursery one needs to be as hard and strong as a limestone boulder. We wish the Valenta family long life and plenty of pleasure from their creations. Z.Z.

Vladimir Valenta beside his crevice garden

Large boulder with Daphnes in crevice



Frost damaged pot and massive water-worn limestone rock.

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Ed.: In recent days yet more friends have visited the nursery of the Valenta family. This photo of a group of members of the VRV ([Vlaamse Rotsplanten Vereniging](#)) who also visited the Prague Show of the KSP ([Klub skalničkářů Praha](#)) is by Frankie Wulleman, the editor of the VRV journal.



Flemish VRV members with Mr Valenta



IRG friend Jan Tholhuisjen who lives again in Roosendaal, Holland after many years in the Czech Republic returns there regularly. This year Jan and his wife visited fifteen gardens and specialist nurseries as well, of course, as many old friends. Jan has made several illustrative videos showing how he has constructed various fine features in his gardens - you may see these [here at Kanaal van JTMT20](#).

He has kindly shared some photos with us of his recent visit to Vladimir Valenta's nursery.

These include this photo of the broken pot, shown by Zdena (on page 17) but from another angle.

Some photos from Jan are of features mentioned above by Z.Z. including several of the new crevice garden.



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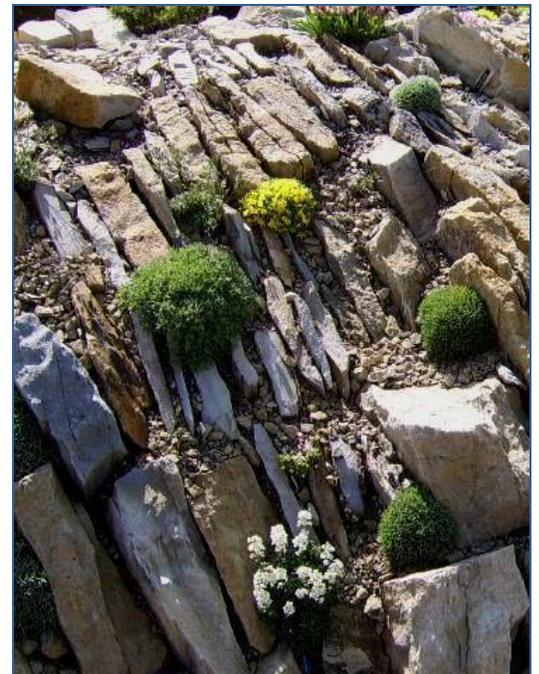
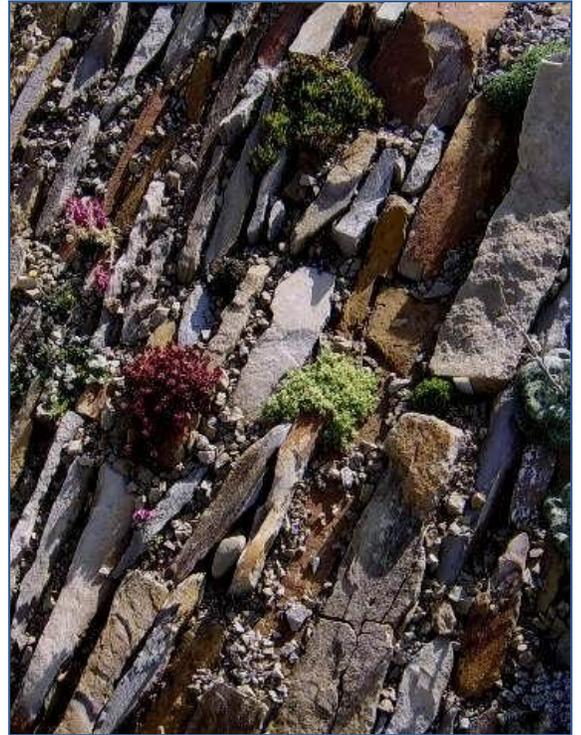
Grafted Witch's Brooms on the nursery.



Hollowed tree trunks as troughs.



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The Prague Rock Garden Club (KSP Klub skalničkářů Praha) is hosting the **3rd Czech Rock Garden Conference in 2017**. Those of you who have not had the pleasure to visit the area or either of the two previous conferences can get a flavour of these events from the reports in the SRGC Forum. For reports from the 2007 tour visits [click here](#) and for those from the 2nd Conference in 2013 [click here](#).

The [third Czech event](#) will be held from 10th – 15th May 2017 at the Congress and Educational Centre Hotel, Průhonice. You can follow the announcements of the speakers etc and be kept up to date with all details from the [KSP website](#) or from [this thread on the Forum](#). Speakers announced so far are **Panayoti Kelaidis** from Denver Botanic Garden, USA; **David Rankin**, SRGC President; **Martin Hajman** from the arctic rock garden in Tromsø, Norway; Czechs **Zdeněk Zvolánek**, **Jiří Papoušek** and **Vojtěch Holubec**; **Brigitte Fiebig** and **Michael Mauser** from Botanischer Garten Tübingen and **Henrik Zetterlund** of Göteborgs botaniska trädgård. A great line-up of speakers. It is expected that booking will open in July – early reservations are recommended to ensure your attendance!

M.Y.

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DIARY OF PROPAGATING AN UNUSUAL BELL HEATHER – THE STORY OF *ERICA CINEREA* ‘MOLLY ROSE’: by Molly Hall, Hampshire.

The discovery:

One Sunday afternoon in August (2013), I went on a walk with my Dad across the heathland at Frensham Ponds, Surrey. I spotted a bell heather with pretty rose pink flowers which looked different from the purple flowers covering the common at this time of year. I pointed it out to my dad, who told me it could possibly be a new variety, and that we should keep an eye on it to see if it really is new. Dad said that if it was different from any other varieties, he would register it and call it ‘Molly Rose’ after me, as I had found it, and because it was rose pink, like my middle name, Rose. I was so excited at the thought of producing a new heather and having it named after me. I badly wanted to take cuttings there and then, but Dad convinced me to wait a little longer. We went back to ‘Molly Rose’ several times that summer (2013), to remind ourselves where it was, as Frensham Ponds Common spreads over a vast area (400 hectares). It was definitely different from the others.

Summer 2014:

We went back to ‘Molly Rose’ in July to see how she was doing. She was definitely a rose pink flowerer, very pretty but not coping very well. Like all of the heather on the common, she was struggling because of the extremely hot, dry summer (the soil is very sandy: Bagshot Sand, Dad told me). We noticed that the shrubs of the common ling were suffering more than the bell heather. They were looking very brown, almost burnt.

Right: Heather Beetle- *Lochmaea suturalis* © [Malcolm Storey](#), 2005



Dad looked at them closer. “Yes, as I suspected”, he said, “the dreaded heather beetle”, as he showed me a tiny olive-green and brown striped beetle. The ling weren’t only suffering from drought, they were

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being eaten alive! The good news for 'Molly Rose' was that heather beetles don't eat bell heather, but the damage done to the others was still upsetting. We decided this was not a good time to be taking cuttings, and to keep an eye on her in the hope she would improve.



Molly taking the cuttings: photo by John Hall.

Autumn 2014:

After many visits it was on 21st September (2014) that 'Molly Rose' looked healthy enough to take cuttings. We also noticed that the ling was recovering from the heather beetle damage, thanks to the regular rainfall. I had my plastic bag with me and some secateurs. I cut some material off her, mainly from around the lower edges where the new growth was best. As soon as I had a good amount Dad drove us back to the nursery, about ten minutes away.

When we got there I prepared to make my new cuttings. I filled a 150-cell tray with compost, a nursery-mix of peat, slow-release fertilizer and Trichoderma (a friendly fungus, Dad told me), watered it in and then pricked holes in each cell. I sat down in the potting shed and started to make cuttings from the wood I'd collected. I selected the youngest growth, about 4cm long, pinched the tip out and stripped the leaves from the lower half, and put one in each cell. Luckily I had collected enough material to fill the tray completely: 150 cuttings.

It took me about an hour and a half. When I finished I wrote out a label with my name "Molly Rose" (Figure 2) and the date "21st September 2014" and put it in the tray.

Tray with the cuttings, labelled, ready to root

That was the easy bit done. Now to get them rooted. I'd had some experience before as about six years ago, when I was 6, I did some cuttings of *Erica x stuartii* 'Irish Lemon' (my favourite) which I rooted, potted up and sold at a local flower show for £1 each. I raised £100 towards our school project which sponsored a village school in Uganda.



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Propagation tent

I put my 'Molly Rose' cuttings into a small propagation tent I had made with my dad's help. It was very simple; just wire hoops and canes with milky polythene draped over the top.

I had put this in one of Dad's bigger polythene tunnels on the nursery, which had been white-washed for shade. I watered the tray using a watering can, with the rose turned down to firm the cuttings in. I then put the cover back over the tent. Now all I had to do was wait and hope for roots to appear.

The making of 'Molly Rose':

We don't live on the nursery so I rely on my dad to keep them watered when they needed it. I go down to the nursery each weekend as I have two chickens, a Warren called Betty and a Lavender bantam called Tallulah, and two Aylesbury ducks called Charlie and Lola, which I clean out and give fresh bedding. I also inspect my cuttings to see how they are doing, and check that Dad is looking after them for me. If they need a little water I give them a light splash with the watering can. I was tempted to pull out a cutting and check for root, but Dad said to leave them for at least a month before doing that, as the roots are so delicate that I could damage them, and to be patient (which is not very easy). The cuttings continued to look healthy so Dad must have been doing something right. It is 28 October 2014 and I'm on the nursery to clean out my ducks and chickens, and Dad said it might be worth checking 'Molly Rose' for root. I went into the poly-tunnel and removed the cover from the propagation tent, took my tray of cuttings out and placed it on the table. I noticed that a few of the cuttings had a small amount of new growth on them, which is a good sign.

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A rooted cutting of 'Molly Rose'

I carefully pull the first one out and Wow! Bright white roots and on my first one! A big smile spread across my face. I gently replace it back into its cell, lightly firming it in. I couldn't help pulling out another, not so good this time. I go for one more and it has great root, as do most of the others I gently pull out, being careful to return them. I'm so pleased with 'Molly Rose'.

I will continue checking on my cuttings at weekends, and when they have all rooted strongly enough, hopefully by early next spring (2015), I'll pot them up and grow them on to flower in the summer, for the first time as *Erica cinerea* 'Molly Rose'.

M. H.

First published: [Heathers 12: 18–22](#) © M. Hall 2015

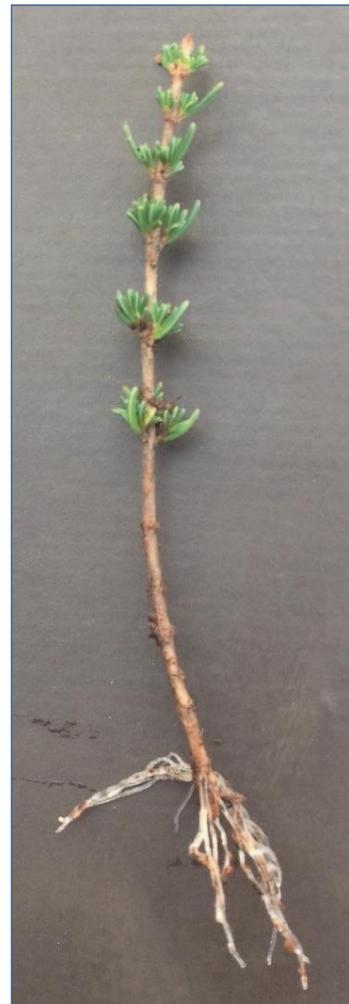


Postscript from Dr Charles Nelson (editor of the Heather Society Yearbooks), written at the time of the first publishing of this article in 2015: Molly, at the time of writing, is 12 years old, the youngest author to have contributed to The Heather Society's Yearbook (the previous holder of this "record" is now Professor Ian Small who, aged 13, contributed "First impressions" to [Yearbook 2 \(no. 5\)](#): 7–8.1976).

Erica cinerea 'Molly Rose' was formally registered by

John Hall on 3 November 2014: registration here in [this Supplement](#) to the International register of heather names XV).

Ed.: [Plant Heritage](#) posted in social media on December 3rd 2015 about Molly Hall's involvement with the propagation of the last two remaining plants of 'Trinklet' & 'Mickle Dickkle' to assist in their conservation. Molly attended with the son and daughter of plant hunter Dick Ide to plant out examples of their late father's very rare heathers in the National Collection at RHS Wisley. These heathers had almost been lost to cultivation but were rescued by Molly's propagation efforts. Molly is the daughter of the Heather Society's John Hall, a nurseryman from Hampshire. The photos below are from Plant Heritage's Twitter page.



We wish Molly great success in future and are happy to have made her an SRGC member.