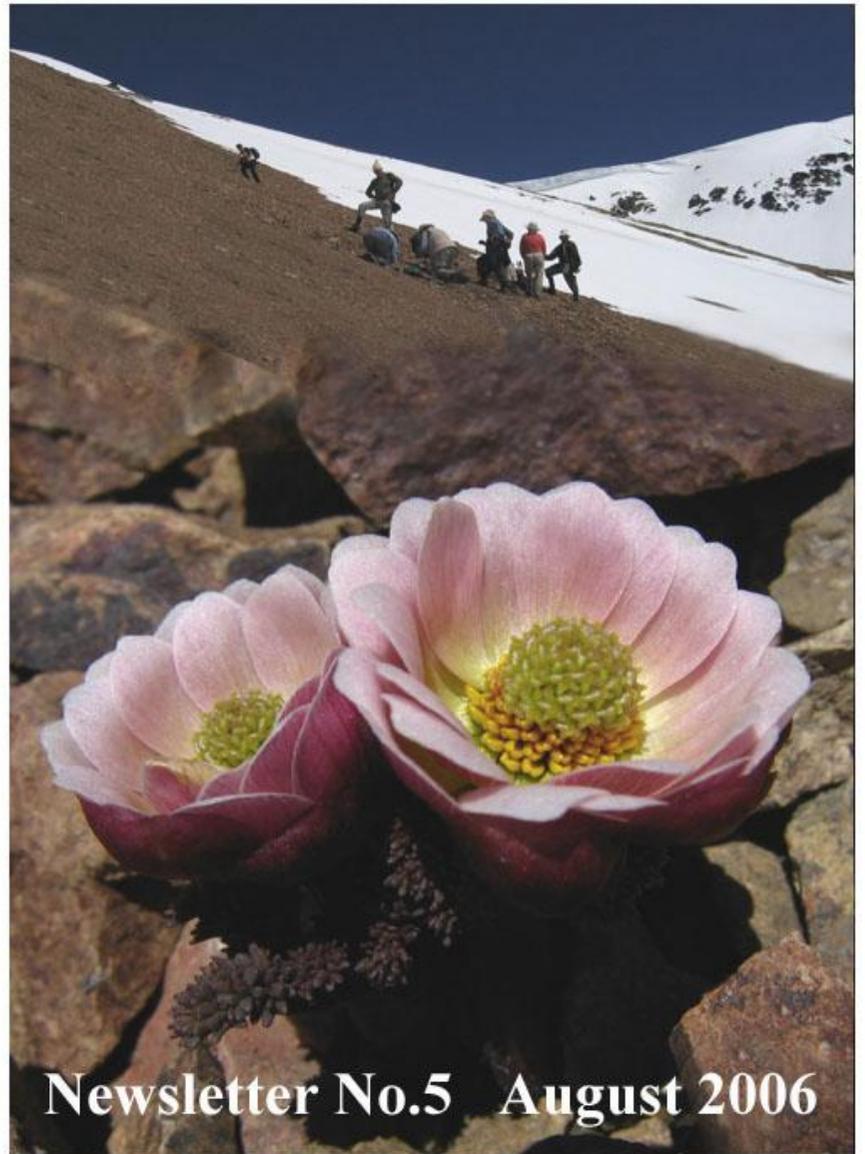




THE ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY
ULSTER GROUP



Cover Picture : *Ranunculus verticillatus*
Cerro La Hoja, Patagonia

Newsletter No.5 August 2006



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Editorial

While only our President for one year, the late John McWhirter has left the Ulster Group with a lifetime's legacy of a love for both plants and people. His obituary was published on the website and he is remembered in this Newsletter with a tribute for all his show work by Pat Crossley, the Show Secretary, and a lovely account of "John's Day" by Kay Dunlop, our Past Chairman. Members had a further opportunity to contribute to the John McWhirter Travel Bursary at the "Easter Bonnet Day" which took place at the home of Margaret and Louis Glynn. I think John would have appreciated the fun of the day which helped to increase the fund to almost £5,000.

John will live long in the memory of those privileged to know him but he would not have wanted us to look back but to plan for the future.

It is very fitting that his successor as President is his long-time friend, Mr. Bob Gordon. We wish him a long and happy presidency and hope that some of our newer members are inspired by his enthusiasm to a life-long love of plants.

One of our longest attending members, Mrs. Susan Montgomery, has very kindly agreed to become a vice-president. Susan's generosity with plants is well known and I am sure there are many members who have a plant or cutting from her garden.

We have had the pleasure of seeing some of our members' gardens featured on television recently. Congratulations are due and also to Harold McBride for the beautiful article on *Meconopsis* in a recent upmarket publication.

Last year gave us many interesting lectures, a new venue for our luncheon, one of the best shows ever, and, thanks to our many helpers, we still can enjoy the social contact over a cup of tea.

Next year should prove of equal interest with the Dr. Molly Sanderson Memorial Lecture being honoured by Roy Lancaster. In order to give as many people as possible the opportunity of hearing him speak, we have taken a larger lecture theatre. While it will be free as usual to all our members, to keep a check on numbers (we have to comply with health and safety regulations), admission will be by ticket only. As in other years, friends and garden societies will also be very welcome but to cover the cost of the larger theatre, a charge will be made for non-member tickets. I am sure it will be a lecture to remember so when the tickets become available, make sure you apply in time.

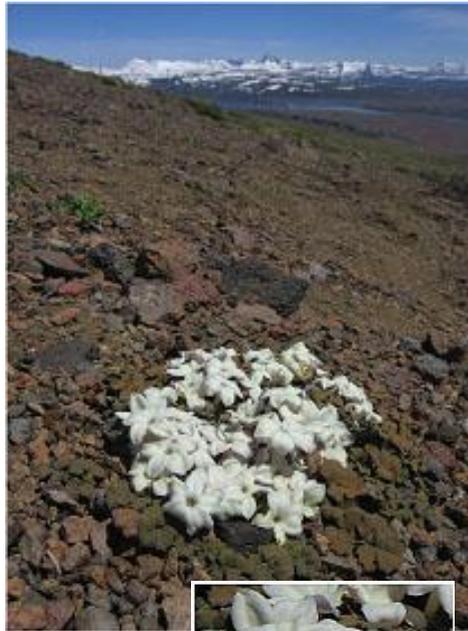
Information does tend to be repetitive - this year it is interspersed with photos and contributions, so please read to the end. Some articles haven't made the deadline this time, but they will keep to next year! In the meantime, thank you to all our members for their wonderful attendance and support last year, I hope everyone has a lovely summer break and look forward to meeting up again in the autumn.

Northern Patagonia – Travels with the AGS

Joan McCaughey

When my husband, Liam, announced we were going with the A.G.S. to Northern Patagonia, to say that I was unenthused would be an understatement. All I could recall about the area was a lecture entitled “What to do on a Wet Day in Patagonia”, also that it was windy as well as wet and, coming from Northern Ireland, this did not sound very appealing. In addition I was not as fit as I would have liked, so perhaps you will understand my increasing apprehension as the date of our departure in November drew near.

Our travels got off to an unpromising start as snow closed the airport in Paris, causing the main group to miss their flight to Buenos Aires. Liam and I were on a different ticket and found ourselves flying directly from London, wondering if we were going to be on our own. However Ian and Carole Bainbridge from Edinburgh also made it on time to Buenos Aires only for us to find that there was a domestic Argentine air strike. As the first part of our tour and our first hotel were on the Valdes peninsula, 800K away, this was a problem. By some miracle we suddenly found ourselves boarding the one and only plane going south that evening. Our Argentine guides were surprised to find a party of 4 instead of the expected 20!



The rest of the AGS party could write a book on their trials trying to join us, with detours through America and Brazil. On reaching Buenos Aires they found the air strike now complete with no domestic flights – the good news was they got a bus – the bad news was, they travelled in it for 16 hours non stop overnight. AGS tour members are indeed a hardy breed for in spite of lack of sleep, after a quick shower and breakfast, they were ready to explore Patagonia.

If you were hoping for a long list of strange plant and place names, I am going to disappoint you as this is more about adventures with the AGS and I am only going to give the top favourites as chosen by the group at the end. Perhaps the stressful start caused our group of now 19 (one member opted out at the onset of the problems) to gel well together and I had one of my most enjoyable holidays. Here tribute must go to our leaders, John and Hilary Birks, Hilary Little – a very cool lady in a crisis - and our Argentinean guides, Marcela Ferreyra, who enthused us all with her knowledge of plants and Ariel, who made sure we were well fed. Ian and Carole Bainbridge’s expert knowledge of the South American birds added another dimension to the tour. The back-up team was excellent too with safe drivers. Even the weather behaved with mostly sunny days and very little wind.



Our tour of Patagonia started off on the east coast for two days to see the wild life and flora of the Valdes peninsula. Then we spent a long day travelling 600K west through the steppe to reach the foot of the Andes. From there we drove north through the lake district, near Bariloche, and climbed a little to see the wonderful chain of volcanoes before finally flying back to Buenos Aires.

Magic moments:-



The overall favourite plant of the expedition was *Ranunculus semiverticillatus* found at La Hoya in both pink (cover picture) and white forms. To see this beautiful buttercup for the first time on a steep snow covered scree with a condor soaring over the snow-capped peaks above was simply pure magic. Having heard Harold McBride's wonderful lecture on 'Ranunculaceae –plants worth

getting excited about', I now understand why.

Viola cotyledon, one of the rosulate violas, was second favourite and my memory is seeing it growing at the summit of Volcan Batea Mahuida, with a magnificent panorama of seven snow-capped volcanoes, some gently smoking, and a blue crater lake below.

Third favourite was *Jaborosa volkmannii*, a new plant to me, and described by the Watsons as "a plant whose every part shouts class, and which can manufacture from volcanic dust a perfume to upstage any female habituee of the Ritz".



This was found on the slopes of Cordon del Cajon Chico, another beautiful mountain, 2248m high, where we also found sheets of white *Calandrinia affinis*, sixth on the favourite list. We stayed here in Caviahue where the hotel's safety instructions included what to do if the volcano erupted, as it had done in 2001 with lava pouring down both sides of the hotel!

Viola coronifera, another rosulate viola, was fourth favourite perhaps because it was a marathon effort to see it growing on Cerro Colohuincul, and I am not surprised that probably less than one hundred people have seen it growing wild. Here I must confess that only Marcela's wonderful encouragement persuaded me up many a slope with the promise of a "beautiful flower - bueno". Thanks Marcela.



A visit to this region would not be complete without seeing the magnificent *Araucaria araucana*, fifth favourite, and growing below the monkey puzzles, carpets of the deepest pink and best *Oxalis adenophylla*, (eighth favourite) I have ever seen.

Other favourites chosen by the group included ourisias, junellias, orchids and many more but I promised not to overload you with plant names. Liam's photos (see also the Group website) may give you an even better idea of both country and plants and it would be lovely to be able to grow some of them here.

It wasn't only the plants that provided the magic moments for, after a long tiring day watching Magellanic penguins with their chicks, elephant seals, guanacos and other wildlife, as I felt I had reached saturation point, an Orca whale jumped out of the ocean. And, when we told him some weeks later, this was what most impressed my little step grandson.

In retrospect I feel it was a privilege to have been on this expedition for not only did we have wonderful flora and fauna but also comfortable accommodation, good food and wine, expert guides and plenty of laughter. In spite of all my initial misgivings, I enjoyed every moment and went on round the world to visit family feeling remarkably fit and hoping some day to return to Patagonia.

Miniature conifers for the alpine raised bed, trough and sink.

Hugh McAlister – photos courtesy of Gordon Haddow, Kenworth Nursery (concluded from previous issue)

There are well over a hundred species of pines, most of which are found in the Northern hemisphere, reaching to the Arctic circle.

Some pines become very large trees of up to 60 metres but, in high mountain regions and the Tundra, pines tend to be true dwarfs or miniatures. Pines make excellent garden plants since they can survive and even thrive on very poor soils. They can be found on sand-dunes, Rocky outcrops and crevices. Gardeners can choose from a wide variety of cultivars selected from seedlings found in the wild and witches brooms on mature trees. Alpine gardeners prefer true dwarfs or miniatures which can be grown in raised scree beds, troughs and sinks.

Pines come in all types of colours, shapes and forms. Gardeners on the European continent and in North America use miniature conifers and, especially pines, to great effect in containers and in rock gardens.

Some “Must Have” miniature pines

PINUS HELDREICHII SCHMIDTII

This pine was found by Eugen Schmidt in 1926 in the mountains near Sarajevo, Yugoslavia, not as a witches broom but as a 100 year old broadly conical bush 3m/10feet high and wide. Herr Schmidt took grafts for reproduction but the original is still growing where he found it. Pinus Heldreichii Schmidtii is reliably dwarf. In his book “Manual of dwarf conifers” Humphrey Welch stated that “a grafted plant at the Pruhonice Research station, in the Czech Republic was no more than 50cms. high after 40years.”



This pine is densely globular or very conical in shape with sharp dark green needles. It seems that it tends to be more compact on poor thin soils. It thrives in good light with perfect drainage. Pinus Heldreichii Schmidtii must be in the top ten dwarf conifers and with an annual growth rate of about 4cms. it is an excellent miniature for a trough or raised bed. A cultivar called PINUS HELDREICHII “PYGMY” appears to be almost identical to “SCHMIDTII” and a garden worthy plant.

PINUS MUGO (DWARF MOUNTAIN PINE)

Some PINUS MUGO forms are very suitable for planting in rock gardens, troughs and raised beds.

PINUS MUGO “MOPS” This is a very popular conifer, compact with light green needles,



PINUS M. “MINIMOPS” is a real gem for a trough, or miniature garden. It is a tight ball of small needles clustered around miniature winter buds. It reaches about 25cms. high and wide in 10 years.

P.mugo. mops

PINUS M. “CARSTEN” is a most attractive dwarf pine much wider than high, which in late autumn turns a deep, nearly orange colour, the colour remaining until new growth emerges in the following May. Good companions for this pine are early bulbs such as the blue muscari or the contrasting foliage of Ophiopogon planiscapus nigrescens. Other good colour variants of P. Mugo include PINUS M. “OPHIR”, PINUS M. “WINTERGOLD” and PINUS M. “POT OF GOLD.”



PINUS PARVIFLORA (JAPANESE WHITE PINE)

These pines are grown widely in Japan and there are many cultivars and miniatures much sought after by alpine gardeners and lovers of Bonsai subjects. Here, due to lack of space, only a few true miniatures will be described.



PINUS P. "FUTSUMO"

This is a lovely miniature and extremely slow growing pine. It has a single leader with short horizontal branches. Leaves are quite long, yellow green and incurving. It is really a collector's plant.

PINUS P." GOLDBLOCKS"

This is a small cushion plant with very bright gold leaves but the plant does appear to scorch in prolonged periods of hot sun (not often applicable to the U.K). This tree may eventually become conical but, of course, can be kept to cushion shape with careful pruning. This little pine will never outgrow it's position.]



PINUS P." HAGOROMO SEEDLING"

This is a true miniature – in ten years probably 30cms/12ins. high and the same across. The plant is a very small bun shape with soft blue-green needles. It is an excellent plant for a trough or miniature garden.

PINUS P. "KIYOMATSU"

"KIYOMATSU" is a small cushion – shaped pine with short dark green/silver leaves and matchstick size stems. It is an excellent specimen for a trough or sink garden. A ten year old plant will be around 12cms. high x 23cms.across.



PINUS STROBUS (WEYMOUTH PINE)

This pine, native to Canada and the U.S. is a handsome tree with soft, blue green needles and can exceed 50 metres in height. However, there are many dwarfs but most need constant pruning to keep them small. One or two are excellent for the small rock garden.



PINUS S. "GREG"

"GREG" is a compact rounded bush, whose short needles are mid-yellow to green which is unusual for the species. Like most strobis types, good drainage is essential.

PINUS S. "SEA URCHIN"

This is an outstanding specimen which is a true miniature, found as a witch's broom. It makes a small rounded, dense ball with bright silver/blue foliage, the long needles, hiding the branches. A ten year old plant will be in the region of 15cms.high by 15cms wide. It is ideal for a trough or miniature garden.



PINUS SYLVESTRIS (SCOTS PINE)



The scots pine is a British native and can reach 100feet high in the wild but there are several distinctive dwarfs. However, most of these are too large for the small rock garden. There are a couple suitable for troughs or small sink gardens.

PINUS SYLVESTRIS “PIXIE”

Pixie is a tight bun shaped plant with short mid- green needles. At ten years old this little conifer reaches about 20cms. high by 15cms across. It is ideal for trough or scree garden.

PINUS S. “TREASURE”

“TREASURE” is another attractive miniature. It’s shape is variable, and can be flat-topped or broadly conical. It has beautiful light blue needles. It looks well on a rock garden or trough.



John’s Day by Kay Dunlop

On a cold, damp, grey day in November 2005, over 100 AGS members gathered in the garden of the late John McWhirter. Weather did not matter – let it rain! We were on a Mission. A sale of John’s plants was taking place.

Pots of plants were lined up on trestle tables, pots were behind the tables and beneath them. Dactylorhizas, primulas, erythroniums, rhododendrons, a treasure trove of plants were there to be bought, as we elbowed and jostled our way to the tables.

Then, flushed with success, the frenzy of buying over and trophies safely stowed into cars, we took a last walk around John’s garden as if to say good- bye.

A short drive took us to the Belmont Hotel for warmth, good food and a chance to reminisce about John. This was our Memorial Service for John and we shared memories and talked of his love of plants and people and poetry. I like to remember John by a line from one of his favourite poets – Leigh Hunt – “ Write me as one that loves his fellow men.”

In his will, John left all his plants to Margaret Glynn and Bob Gordon. With great generosity, they decided to give AGS members the opportunity to buy some of these, *as a memory of John*. Many days were spent by a group of members, digging up, making compost, potting up and labelling – a mammoth task – a lot of the work taking place in heavy rain. We are very grateful to Margaret and Bob and their team. They worked so hard to have everything ready for the sale.

The profits will go to a travel bursary in John’s name which is a very worthy memorial.

It is good to know that John’s plants are now flourishing throughout Ireland. Thank you, Margaret and Bob.

Do You Know What I Know?

by **Jim Price**

(Some thoughts on growing alpines, requested by the editor, from someone with many years of experience and who is always willing to give help and advice.)



I can't pin point an exact time when the lure of alpines began. After many decades of growing and experimenting my initial concept of what an alpine actually is has changed. Knowledge through reading and experience increases constantly. *The most important governing factor for success is to find out how alpine plants from severe mountain conditions above the tree line cope naturally.* Back in the garden we who aspire to grow and possibly show alpines can simulate these conditions in several ways:-

1. General garden culture;

Small shrubs and other woodlanders can easily be incorporated in to the planting plan with the alpines and they also associate well with spring bulbs. *Watch out that they do not get crowded out!!*

2. Rockery;

This requires careful siting using local stone if possible where it pleases. *Thought should be given a long time before you commence.* A mental picture of your special rocky landscape will have evolved including location and proportion. Consider basic requirements e.g. air circulation, no large overhanging trees and prepare a moisture retentive but free draining soil composition.

3. Raised beds;

These can be any size, height or shape to slot into your plan, the construction of hard landscaping is very important and - whatever medium you use – natural dry stone, brick or synthetics – it should be easy on the eye. The make up of the fill will depend on the choice of plants but good screened garden loam mixed with equal parts grit is usually acceptable plus

some Vitax Q4. *Firm the soil as you fill each unit to minimise sinking.* If using dry stone for edging, plant in the crevices as you proceed.

4. Troughs and Tufa

Both are particularly suitable where the beauty of small alpines can be appreciated and more attention given to their special needs. Whether lucky enough to be the owner of real stone troughs or handy enough to have made some in hypertufa, *drainage holes are essential.* Miniature gardens in troughs can be particularly appealing.

5. Frames

Frames are suitable for bulb culture and covered ones give winter protection to younger and vulnerable plants from winter rain. Seedlings just pricked out can be housed here too.

6. Alpine houses

For more specialist alpines which are not suitable for growing outside, these can be placed in pots and plunged in sand. Care must be given to provide extra shading and ventilation. *Keep a close eye for pests such as greenfly, red spider mite and vine weevils.*

Attend alpine shows to see the wide variety of plants that can be grown by enthusiasts. Chatting with the growers is a valuable source of knowledge and can give encouragement to put plants on the show bench yourself. Perhaps this will encourage more people to exhibit at shows. Most of us like a challenge and try to experiment with plants, soil mixes, maintenance and propagation. I've learned a lot but will never know it all. So the fascination continues.

"No occupation is so delightful to me as the culture of the earth, and no culture comparable to that of the garden. Such a variety of subjects, some are always coming to perfection, the failure of one thing repaired by the success of another, and instead of one harvest a continued one throughout the year."

Thomas Jefferson 1743 - 1826

Information about us

The Ulster Group is affiliated to the Alpine Garden Society, which was founded in 1929, and has grown to become one of the largest specialist garden societies in the world, with its aim to promote an interest in alpine plants both in cultivation and in their natural habitats. Now it is also the international society for not only alpinists but also encompasses rock garden and small hardy herbaceous plants, hardy and half – hardy bulbs, hardy ferns and small shrubs.

The parent society provides advice, insurance and show help to local groups as well as its excellent bulletins, holidays, seed exchange, conferences etc. and local groups need its overall cover. With the recent changes to the constitution, in future at least 75% of local group members will have to belong to the A.G.S. for the Group to remain under its auspices, so we appeal to all our local members, who have not done so already to make this the year to really **belong** to the AGS . However we all need to meet locally and hence the Ulster Group.

Venue

At present meetings are held on Saturdays in the Lecture Theatre*, Main Building, Stranmillis University College, Belfast, where there are good parking facilities. The lectures begin at 2.30 p.m. from September until March, exact dates given on the fixtures card. *(One lecture this year in the Drama theatre)

Organisation

The Ulster Group is run by a small committee composed of a Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary, Programme Secretary, Treasurer, Show Secretary, and five committee members including the past Chairman. The Chairman and the committee members serve for two years, with two members being elected each year, and further members can be co-opted if necessary. All must belong to the A.G.S. The committee meets three times a year and tries to ensure the smooth running of the Group. An effort is made to try to let all our members serve on the committee so that they are

familiar with all aspects of our activities and with the revised constitution there is a time limit on all posts.

As well as the committee we need helpers for everything from making tea, selling plants, tidying, opening gardens, etc. so I appeal to everyone to help in any way you can. And once again our sincere thanks to all our helpers, without you there would be no group!

Group Finances

The Group finances are in the capable hands of the Hon. Treasurer, Mrs. Margaret Glynn, who with the help of an expert accountant's advice, keeps us in the black! The income comes from subscriptions, plant sales, raffles etc; while expenses include lecture room hire, speakers expenses and fees, capital expenditure etc. The income and expenditure accounts are presented at the AGM.

Group Subscriptions

Local current subscriptions rates are £8.00 single, £10.00 family . To help our **treasurer, please put your subscription into the envelope provided with your name, title, address, postal code, and telephone number and email (if wished), clearly written on the outside. Give this or post it to Mrs. Margaret Glynn, Hon. Treasurer** either at the A.G.M. or before the end of the current year. A limit of one year's grace is given.

This subscription is for the local Group only and subscriptions to The Alpine Garden Society must be sent direct.

Visitors are welcome to our lectures for the small fee of £1.00 but feel free to invite anyone who might be interested in joining. Membership forms, both local and A.G.S. are available from the secretary.

A.G.M. and Plant Sale

The AGM is the work meeting of the year when the Reports and Accounts for the year are presented and the Officers and Committee are elected or re-elected. Any changes or future proposals are also discussed.

After the business is finished there is an extra special plant sale as this is our first meeting after the summer break and a short lecture is also included to add interest to the meeting.

Dr. Molly Sanderson Memorial Lecture.

Dr. Mary Elizabeth (Molly) Sanderson 1913-1995, was President of the Ulster Group A.G.S. from 1985 to 1995. To ensure that the Ulster members would continue to have a high standard of lecturers, she left a bequest to the Group for a lecture in her memory, the speakers always being of the highest calibre. Both the family and the Ulster Group feel particularly honoured this year by Mr. Roy Lancaster giving her memorial lecture.

Plant Stall

Before and after each meeting there is a plant stall, where everyone can buy plants and bring plants to sell. At present Pat and George Gordon have worked tirelessly to run an excellent stall and as this is a major source of income we need everyone to contribute. If you can help in any way it will be appreciated especially at Show time and Pat and George will be only too pleased to help and advise on suitable plants both to bring or buy. At Christmas this stall takes the form of a Christmas Fayre.

Badges

To make it easier to get to know each other name badges are given to all new members, *should be worn by all*, and can be replaced for a small fee. These are made by our Programme Secretary, Heather Smith who also provides the very professional title and plant name slides.

Termonfeckin

For some years now the Dublin Group of the A.G.S. have organised a weekend in November in An Grianan, Termonfeckin near Drogheda. The house was originally a Bishop's Palace, now run by the Irish Countrywoman's Association to hotel standards and set in beautiful surroundings. Booking forms and programmes are available at our Autumn meetings and you are guaranteed a great weekend.

Shows

We have two local shows run by our Show Secretary, Mrs. Pat Crossley, and her committee, all only too pleased to give more information. Our main show dates alternates with the Dublin group to vary the plants seen and both groups appreciate their mutual support as this makes for a larger and better show.

Members' Show

For some twenty years March is the month when a "Members' Show" has been held – a schedule drawn up to encompass classes suitable from beginners to the more experienced.

The Members' Show is open to ALL AGS Ulster Group members and was conceived to encourage the first time exhibitor.

This is purely a local show and points awarded are not credited towards merit medals of the main AGS Show department.

The Alpine Garden Society – Ulster Show

The Ulster Show is held each year in the beautiful surroundings of Greenmount Campus- well worth a visit on its own.

It is organised by the Show Secretary under the direction of the current Director of Shows at Pershore.

The Show is the Ulster Group's shop window when the general public can see and enjoy many alpine gems and hopefully join us.

It should be emphasised that all exhibitors at A.G.S. Shows must be FULL members of the Society, not just the Ulster Group.

While this year's show was excellent, with a well deserved Farrer Medal going to Gordon Toner for his beautiful *Paeonia cambessedessii*, we depend on new exhibitors coming forward and also new members helping the team effort. So please continue to support our hard working Show Secretary and the show committee for it is **your** show.



“Ours! – For a Season” a tribute from Pat Crossley

Yes ! – that’s what the AGS Ulster Group Show Committee were privileged to have had in John McWhirter – ‘for a season’. Fortunately during the two decades I’ve been on this committee, John was there – ready to encourage, give advice, share his expertise on many subjects – always ready to listen to everyone else’s point of view on Schedule change – or any matters pertaining to the Show. He so hoped for new exhibitors and chatted at length with that cheerful twinkle in his eye for new members. Show meetings were the richer for his presence – accompanied often by the poetry that flowed from his lips. As a judge he was both expert and fair – and these are the qualities that spring readily to mind of our much loved Show Committee member. We will honour his memory by maintaining the high standard of shows – and encouraging others, as was John’s special gift. We were grateful that he left his show medals and two special trophies for use by the Show Committee, in the care of Margaret and Bob. One of these, an AGS glass bowl that John was so proud of, was used for the first time at the 2006 Members’ Show for Best Plant - the other similar bowl, the Committee felt should be given back to Bob, John’s long-time friend and currently our President.

Thanks for the memories, John – I felt your near presence at our recent show – the first I hadn’t that ready smile of encouragement across the bench – but I know you would have been pleased both at the quality of the plants and the quantity – and the good attendance on a beautiful day – ‘Ours for a Season’ and for all who knew and loved and were guided by John – it was just too short.



Garden Visits and Outings



Firstly thanks to all our members who so kindly open their gardens to us in both winter and summer months. These visits always prove popular and most enjoyable and we appreciate all the work, gardening skills and hospitality that this entails. We all enjoyed our visits this year to the gardens of Hilary & William McKelvey and Gwen & Harold McBride



Meconopsis punicea
(Harold & Gwens’ garden, photo Ian Scroggy)

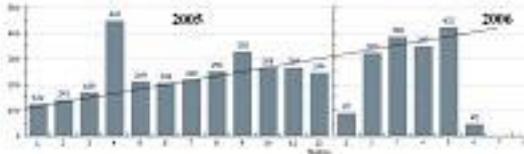


Pulsatilla albana
(William & Hilarys’ garden)

A longer garden visit has been organised each year by Mrs. Margaret Glynn, this year to gardens in North Wales and the Tatton Park Show.

Website

The website – www.alpinegarden-ulster.org.uk – continues to develop steadily, and members are accessing it more each month. We have photos from shows and garden visits, and members contribute their knowledge in occasional articles and with the Plant of the Month.



However we do need a continued supply of material from members, and would ask anyone who has something to contribute to contact the Secretary, directly or at secretary@alpinegarden-ulster.org.uk. As well as these the Ulster and Dublin Programmes are published, and you can download PDF copies of this and earlier Newsletters.

If you haven't visited the website so far, on the page opposite is an example of what you are missing !! - just one of the members' contributions which have been appearing each month, this one picked randomly was Plant of the Month for April.

Epipactis gigantea by William McKelvey

Epipactis gigantea is a member of the Orchidaceae Family.

A hardy Orchid that is found in much of western U.S. and up into British Columbia.



Although it grows in damp meadows and along stream banks in its native habitat, the common American name being 'stream orchid', we have it growing in full sun on the scree bed and along the path of a semi-shaded herbaceous border.



Its leafy stems can grow to 60cm, ours grows 35cm to 40cm. In June and July flowers form at the leaf joints along the top half of the stem. The leaves, 8 to 12 per stem, are glossy green; the flowers are 30mm across and are in shades of red, pink, green, yellow and white.



It has vigorously spreading rhizomes that form large clumps quite readily; we divide ours in spring approximately every three years. This is an ideal first orchid for those looking for something a bit different.