



THE ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY  
ULSTER GROUP



Newsletter No. 8 August 2009



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**Editorial**

Another year has sped by so quickly and I have the impression that it has been a very happy and successful one - so congratulations to all the committee. Lectures were well attended and there was always a great buzz of conversation over tea-time, giving everyone time to exchange news and views and meet new members.

After many years our luncheon returned to the Belmont Hotel in Banbridge, where an excellent meal was followed by an entertaining and practical talk by Susan Band, and who can forget "The Mountains of Mourne" by Hugh.

Unfortunately I was unable to go on the Spring Garden Visit to Limavady but, thanks to a CD of photos by Sam McDowell, I can appreciate why it proved so enjoyable. The gardeners, Gordon and Rosaleen, Sam and Kay, and James and Elisabeth, certainly gave everyone lots of ideas to try in their own gardens.

We are not long back from a very successful Garden Tour in Scotland where even the weather was perfect. Every garden provided some source of inspiration and, judging by the number of plants brought back home courtesy of Dirk and Ulsterbus, Ulster should be in bloom this summer! Our thanks again to those who have the headache of organising it, namely Margaret, Kay, and, I believe, some input from Mark, so that the rest of us can sit back and enjoy.

Perhaps the highlight of the year was our 70th Show followed by the Dinner in Stormont. We had many more visitors, deservedly - for exhibits, sales, and Greenmount all reached a very high standard and Pat and her team are worthy of the highest praise. I am sure the Joint Rock Committee could not have failed to be impressed and the visit and Dinner in Stormont were memorable experiences to both visitors and members alike. Another very happy week-end finished "At Home with the Glynnns" where our visitors again experienced Ulster hospitality at its best.

Congratulations are due all round this year, for the Alpine Garden Society celebrates its 80th birthday and also the Dublin Alpine Group celebrate their 25th year. The Dublin Group marked the occasion with a Midsummer Party in the National Botanical Gardens at Glasnevin where the Ulster Group presented them with the gift of a tree, *Betula jacquemontii* "Trinity College" planted by our President, Mr. Bob Gordon - a most enjoyable evening.

My attention was caught by an article in the April issue of 'The Garden' by John Grimshaw entitled "What future for plant societies" in which he discusses the rapid changes in special interest groups with the decline of some and the increase use of electronic media.

He ends with this quote : "Adaptation and dynamism, not quiet complacency and senescence, are the ways forward for these groups and the plants they develop, conserve and disseminate information on." (do read the whole article)

Our committee has organised really interesting lectures, a good social programme, delicious tea breaks and hopefully the website is getting increasing use. I would encourage any non-members to come and join us where you will get a friendly welcome, and if you can't make the meetings, keep in touch via the web. I would like to think that we encompass all ages,

remembering and appreciative of the contribution in the past of our older members and giving encouragement to our younger members.

Many thanks are due to all contributors to the Newsletter and I am sure you will enjoy reading their articles and seeing their photos as much as me. At the show I was talking to some of our more recent members and realise that there is a lot of original talent out there to be tapped into in future issues and perhaps even taking over and giving it a new slant - we always welcome change!

The Ulster Group has so far kept up its enthusiasm and as we enter a new season with our **change of venue - St. Bride's Hall** - I trust all our members, both old and new, will have an enjoyable and successful year.

### Obituaries



On a sadder note, I am very sorry to have to record the death of Joan Carvill, founder member and secretary of the Dublin Group for many years. Joan was the instigator and organiser of the Termonfeckin Week-end which did so much to bring together both Northern and Southern gardeners and indeed alpine gardeners from all over the world. I shall remember her as a very elegant lady with many talents including sailing,

rally driving, singing, as well as her gardening skills - she will be sadly missed.

The Dublin Group also lost another much loved and valued member in Anna Nolan, who, in spite of a valiant fight, succumbed to a serious illness. Her beautiful Dublin garden will be remembered by many as will her expert help at plant sales.



The Ulster Group were shocked to hear of the sudden death of Pat Duffy whose company we had all enjoyed on the Scottish trip. Our memories of Pat include buying plants when on holiday, the last minute dash with Show entries, and that lovely twinkle in his eyes. Many members attended the requiem mass and our sympathy goes to his wife and family.

### The Geology of Rock Gardens by George Sevastopulo

“The violets in the mountains have broken the rocks”

Don Quixote in *Camino Real* by Tennessee Williams

Is the connection between plants and rocks as intimate as suggested by this excerpt from Don Quixote's speech, or is the term 'rock garden plant' a misnomer? Should we bother about the geology of the rock garden?

Let us start from the standpoint of the cultivation of rock plants by considering whether rocks are necessary; and if they are to be used, whether it matters what sort of rocks are chosen. Study of rock plants in their natural habitats gives us some clues. Plants from alpine meadows in most cases will almost certainly do well without a rock in sight. *Lilium*



*Daphne petraea*, Passo di Tremezzo, Northern Italy

*martagon*, for example, can be grown perfectly satisfactorily in an herbaceous border. At the other extreme, chasmophytes – plants which are naturally rooted in rock crevices – and scree plants do well in the garden in conditions similar to those they experience in the wild. Crevice gardens, made popular by the Czechs and now familiar to many members of the Ulster Group, allow the rock gardener to grow many plants which otherwise are intractable. *Daphne petraea*, for example, appreciates a position wedged between two pieces of limestone or tufa, mimicking its habitat in the limestone and dolomite cliffs in northern Italy. It is commonly suggested that chasmophytes thrive in their seemingly inhospitable habitats because potential competitors are unable to survive there and reference is commonly made to the cool root run that a chasmophyte enjoys. While the first of these suggestions seems intuitively likely, the evolution of chasmophytes was probably from species with much less exacting environmental requirements. In the case of *Daphne petraea*, one could speculate that it, *Daphne cneorum* and *Daphne striatum* share a common ancestor, and that *D. petraea* evolved the low rate of growth, the longevity required to offset the limited opportunity for successful germination of the

seed, and the resistance to drying cold winds in the winter that allowed it to colonise high, vertical limestone or dolomite cliffs.

What influence does the kind of rock used in a rock garden have on the plants that grow there? In the wild, the most obvious factor is the chemical composition of the bedrock, which may influence the overlying soil in which the plants grow. In nature, calcareous rocks tend to give rise to calcareous soils, which are alkaline and which generally support a higher diversity of plant life than acid soils that develop over granites and quartzites. It is well to remember that where soils are developed on glacial deposits, such as boulder clay, it is the composition of the glacial material which determines the soil chemistry, not that of the bedrock. Gardeners in south County Dublin, who live on boulder clay deposited over the Leinster Granite, are commonly surprised to find that their soil is alkaline, reflecting the transport of the glacial sediment from the limestone-rich Midlands.

While most plants that grow naturally on calcareous soils in the wild will grow perfectly well in neutral or even slightly acid soils in the garden, the reverse is not true. Many plants, particularly in the Ericaceae, are not tolerant of very alkaline soils because the uptake of iron to the plant is inhibited, causing chlorosis. However, the rate of chemical breakdown of rocks used in the construction of a rock garden is relatively slow, even in the case of limestone, and will not change the pH of the soil by much. However, a crushed limestone top dressing, because of the large surface area of the limestone chips, will have a much greater effect, and, of course, powdered limestone is more effective still. Where a plant is growing in proximity to a rock, its root tips, around which the chemical environment may be quite aggressive, may absorb nutrients derived from the rock. For this reason, if for no other, it would be perverse to place lumps of limestone in a peat bed designed to grow calcifuge plants. If you wish to top dress a bed for calcifuge plants with rock chips, it is best to use either crushed quartzite or crushed granite.

Some plants have become adapted to soils with very unusual chemistry and in many cases are restricted to them. Perhaps the most relevant for the alpine gardener are the so-called 'serpentine endemics'. Serpentine is a mineral that is an alteration product of olivine, which characterizes basic and ultrabasic rocks. These may contain relatively high concentrations of elements such as nickel, which are toxic to most plants. Serpentine

endemics have become adapted to such soils and in some species the plant concentrates surprising levels of the toxic element in its tissues. The region of the earth with the greatest diversity of serpentine endemics of interest to the rock gardener is western north America, particularly northern California and southern Oregon. Several bulbs, such as *Fritillaria purdyi*, and non-bulbous alpinines are restricted to areas with ultrabasic bedrock. Fortunately for the gardener, most serpentine endemics grow well in 'normal' soils. Their adaptation to nickel-rich soil has allowed them to escape the competition from the species which do not have this adaptation.

Tufa is a rock that in nature generally does not support a 'rock garden' flora, because it commonly forms at relatively low altitudes, but paradoxically is invaluable to the rock gardener, because many true alpinines will grow in it and almost nowhere else. Tufa is formed of calcium carbonate and is extremely porous. Small deposits of tufa can be seen where water saturated with calcium carbonate seeps to the open, for example in a quarry face, losing some carbon dioxide as it does so, forcing the precipitation of the calcium carbonate on moss and other plant material growing around the seep. The plant material rots leaving the porous calcium carbonate. The commercial deposits of tufa, such as that in north Wales, are fossil and have usually formed as a dam or barrage retaining a lake. The loss of carbon dioxide from the saturated water in this situation is due to a combination of evaporation and uptake by algae. The vegetation which is encrusted commonly includes reeds. Tufa has almost no nutrients for uptake by plants and in this it is similar to the crevices inhabited by alpine chasmophytes, such as *Androsace* and *Saxifraga* spp., which as a consequence, grow very slowly in it and form tight cushions. It also draws up water through capillary action utilizing the myriad small channels left by the rotted vegetation involved in its formation, thus staving off desiccation of the plant roots. A piece of tufa in a trough or as in the garden can house a great number of alpinines and can form a most attractive feature.

Finally, the aesthetics of rock in the rock garden should be considered. However, for this topic, in my opinion, discretion is the better part of valour!

## Favourite Plants:- from an idea by Kay Dunlop

### Billy Moore - A Daphne for all Seasons

Ever since I devoured the excellent account of the genus Daphne by Chris Brickell and Brian Mathew, published in 1976, I have been a devoted fan of these wonderful plants. Sadly this excellent book is now out of date (and probably out of print) but we have the consolation of Robin White's excellent guide published in 2006.

We all know the legend from Greek mythology of poor Daphne, the river nymph, who was transformed into a shrub to protect her from the lustful advances of the god Apollo.



Unfortunately, the plant that the Greeks called

Daphne was in fact the Bay Tree, *Laurus nobilis*. Attractive and useful though the Bay Tree may be, I think Daphne would choose to be remembered by the lovely sweet scented plants that now bear her name.

Since the publication of the Brickell/Mathew book the genus has evolved greatly with the development of many lovely hybrids and the introduction of some new species into cultivation. Of the latter I think the lovely, yellow flowered, *D. calcicola* from China is the most desirable. The new hybrids are beautiful but are expensive and can be fickle.

Every alpine grower should have at least one Daphne in his or her collection. If I were told that I could only have one I would have no hesitation in opting for *D. retusa*.

This Daphne is closely related to *D. tangutica*, and there is a view that they may be conspecific, but the jury is still out: the two plants certainly look very different. *D. tangutica* is also a lovely plant, but to my mind *D. retusa*

is very much superior. Its evergreen foliage is more attractive being smaller and more revolute than its first cousin, dark green and shiny. The leaves provide a wonderful foil to the highly scented flowers which are purplish pink outside and white inside. They are followed by large orange berries which are freely produced, decorative and remain on the plant for a considerable period. *D. retusa* is slow-growing and takes a few years to settle in. It is, however, well worth the wait. It is smaller than *D. tangutica*, seldom exceeding seventy cm. It is robust and trouble free and makes a handsome specimen throughout the year. You should bear in mind that like all members of the genus *D. retusa* is poisonous in all its parts and the fruits may tempt small children.

I was very lucky with my first plant for I was given a mature specimen, perhaps fifty cm tall, by Jim Price who had dug it up from his own garden. The plant survived the disturbance and settled in well in its new home and gave me much pleasure. After I would say about twenty years it started to deteriorate significantly and eventually with great reluctance I had to have it put down. Happily I had planted seedlings in other parts of the garden and so I still enjoy this wonderful shrub.



Another appealing characteristic of *D. retusa* is that it is very easy to propagate by seed. It is simply necessary to collect the berries, remove the flesh and also the thin membrane that covers the seed, washing your hands carefully afterwards. The seeds are sown in the usual way and will germinate in twelve months. I grew literally hundreds of seedlings from Jim's plant which I gave to friends and brought to plant sales over the years. I hope that many Irish gardens, north and south are still graced by its offspring.

## George Gordon - Dream Poppy

For some, gardens are not just a palette to paint with flowers. Flowers can tell a story. It may be they remind us of where we first saw them, be it *Gentiana verna* in the Burren in the first light of an Irish spring morning or *Gentiana acaulis* high in the Austrian Alps along the Höhenstrasse. Or it may be the stories of the men and women who travelled to some of the remotest parts of the world to introduce new species into cultivation.

Few excelled more than Ludlow and Sheriff (although they collected together for more than twenty years they never called each other by their first names). They were not responsible for finding *Meconopsis grandis* but in 1933 George Sheriff discovered it for the first time in Bhutan, and a year later at Nyuksang La found on open stony ground a plant that surpassed every other plant in the area. It was *Meconopsis grandis* GS 600. It may indeed be regarded as the finest plant Sheriff ever collected.

Sheriff married Betty at the start of the war, and they were stationed at Lhasa in Tibet. After hostilities ended Ludlow, Sheriff and Betty were back collecting in Bhutan, where they decided to split up to cover more ground. Betty and Dr JH Hicks were in the east of the country, and on 25th May 1949 at Shingbe Betty had a dream. Sheriff entered her tent and gave her precise directions as to where she should go collecting the next day, and behind a mass of rock she would find a flower she had not seen before. Early the next morning she told Hicks over breakfast about her dream, but he was sceptical. She decided to go alone, and remembering Sheriff's last words to her "Be sure to go". The place was easily found and behind a mass of rock was indeed a poppy she had not seen before – *Meconopsis grandis*! Hicks later photographed it and returned in September to gather seed, and Betty wrote to Sheriff about her dream and asked whether on 25th May he had been thinking of his wife or *Meconopsis grandis*. It took two weeks for the letter to reach him, and several more weeks before the reply came. The answer was "Neither". When seeds of this collection (*Meconopsis grandis* 20671) flowered in Scotland they became known as Betty's Dream Poppy.

How *Meconopsis grandis* led to *Meconopsis x sheldonii* Slieve Donard was ably disentangled by Charles Nelson in Vol 1 of "An Irish Florilegium". Dr

Alec Curle crossed *Meconopsis grandis* and *Meconopsis betonicifolia* in Scotland in 1935 and obtained several seedlings. Some he gave to Edrom Nurseries and some to Hugh Patten. It was Hugh who passed plants on to Mrs Marjorie Dickie in Tyrone, and she gave it to the Slingers in the famous Slieve Donard Nursery at Newcastle below the Mourne Mountains. It was originally put on sale in the 1950's as *Meconopsis grandis* Prain's Variety, This however is an invalid name that was easily solved by looking up at the towering Slieve Donard above the nursery. So Slieve Donard it became, and more correctly *Meconopsis x sheldonii* Slieve Donard as it is a hybrid.



Slieve Donard takes well to cultivation in the north of Ireland and Scotland, where it relishes cool wet summers. It needs a deep, fertile and lime free soil. As it is a hybrid it sets no seed, so is kept in cultivation by division after flowering or in September. It is best to

move it into new soil periodically. Even one plant rewards every effort, but mass plantings are beyond compare. Being infertile it has remained true, and not suffered the fate of many of the blue poppies through hybridisation.

Tonight is exactly 60 years since Betty's dream, and I will go out into the garden to pay homage to an ice blue flower. I realise I have many people to thank. Firstly to Ludlow, Sheriff and Betty and the many others who spent years in the remote regions of the Himalayas finding and collecting the plants that we humbler gardeners may enjoy them in our gardens (Ludlow and Sheriff were the first to send live plants back by air). Secondly to Dr Alec Curle who used the material to raise new plants, and also to his innate generosity (and that of Hugh Patten and Marjorie Dickie) in distributing plants. Thirdly to Roy Slinger who had an unerring eye for a good plant – I

wonder if when it was in flower in his nursery did he just catch a glimpse in his mind's eye of the snowy peaks of Bhutan and Tibet? And most of all to the untold gardeners who have kept this superb plant in cultivation that we might all enjoy it. We owe them all a debt of gratitude.

“An Irish Florilegium” Vol 1 Charles Nelson and Wendy Walsh Thames and Hudson 1983

“A Quest of Flowers” Harold R Fletcher Edinburgh University Press 1975.

### **Margaret Kennedy - A Favourite amongst Favourites**

Ferns to me are a delight. They are among my favourite plants. Ferns exhibit a wide variety of forms ranging from the large and sturdy to the exquisitely delicate and sometimes tiny. Because of this they can create a gentle and romantic mood in the garden. This diversity of forms, adapted to a wide range of environmental conditions, means that no garden needs to be without a fern or two. Enthusiasts may even have a fernery in a shady area devoted almost exclusively to these lovely plants, but even the smallest shady corner will be enhanced by the presence of a fern.



The uninitiated are often dismissive of ferns because they do not produce colourful flowers. Indeed they belong to a totally different group of plants called the Pteridophyta – a more primitive group than that of the seed-bearing flowering plants. Reproduction is by means of tiny, dust – like spores. If given the right conditions they will gently “seed” or should I say “spore” around the garden. They have a very interesting but complicated life cycle.

In late spring and early summer I find ferns about the most seductive plants

in the garden. Although some are evergreen, most are deciduous and die back over winter.

As the days lengthen and grow warmer, the young fronds uncurl like bishops' croziers in glorious shades of light green. There is one however, which is not green at the crozier stage. This is the purple variety of the royal fern – *Osmunda regalis purpurescens*. It emerges as the loveliest deep purple and reaches about a foot high before the purple fades to the usual green.

*Osmunda regalis* is hardy and although it can be found growing with its feet in water by a river or pond or in a West of Ireland bog, it can grow well, if less tall, in ordinary, moist garden conditions. In this latter situation, a plant can reach two to three feet in height, but it can achieve five to six feet high, as can be seen around the pond at Mount Stewart. It does not require shade and although it prefers an acid soil, it will tolerate a neutral or even slightly alkaline one. *O. regalis purpurescens* may be just a little more tender. When growing well it produces very regal and erect brown spring fronds and in the autumn turns a lovely golden yellow colour. You won't want to cut it back, but when you eventually have to in your autumnal tidy – up, you can look forward to the delightful, emerging purple fronds once again in the spring.

### **Harold McBride - Calochortus uniflorus**

It was at an AGS Ulster Group visit to our President Bob Gordon's garden over twenty years ago that I first saw *Calochortus uniflorus* and along with other Group members stood in line to admire and photograph a fine example of this North American bulb growing happily in a raised bed.

Bob kindly gifted me some seed from his fine plant and I have also introduced it several times from wild seed collections. I am pleased to now have it well established in several troughs and a raised bed.



The genus *Calochortus* has a reputation for being very difficult to grow but this is only true of cultivation in open ground.

Without doubt *C. uniflorus* is the most suitable for outdoor work in Irish gardens as it will tolerate and indeed seems to enjoy lots of moisture during the summer months.

Some years ago I visited the Willamette Valley in Oregon and sought out this plant at elevations to 5000 ft. I was surprised to find the flowers very variable in quality, so it is worth looking out for good forms.

I was saddened to recently learn that the Southernmost known population of *C. uniflorus* at San Luis Obispo County had been completely destroyed by a range improvement programme.



A plant I grew from seed collected in Santa Cruz, California has attractive pale pink flowers rather than the normal pale lilac, this pink form comes true from seed.

When grown from seed I keep the small vulnerable seedlings in a pot for two to three years before planting in position in a sunny trough or raised bed. Care must be taken to avoid slug damage to emerging leaves in early spring.

*C. uniflorus* flowers in late May or early June and seed may be collected in July and sown when fresh.

## 70<sup>th</sup> Ulster Show – Pat Crossley

Some two years ago when we started to make plans for the 70<sup>th</sup> Ulster Show, I said to the Show subcommittee my dream would be to have show benches crammed full of nice plants, and a packed hall of people to enjoy them! - well on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> April 2009 that dream came true! -

On a bright and sunny morning with the grounds of Greenmount looking at their best the atmosphere was electric with early morning exhibitors arriving with their plants and greeting friends old and new.



The Show room and the magnificent backdrop of the artistic section had been expertly “set-up” the day before by a dedicated band of helpers.

As the exhibitors staged their plants, there was less and less brown plastic covering showing as pots were moved to make space – a long time since we had this problem! Entries were “up” in every class, in both plants and the artistic section, and all were of a very high standard.

The corridors outside the show room were a hive of activity also with a well stocked AGS plant stall manned by Pat Gordon and her team, alongside Paddy and her team selling ballot tickets and Joan at the publicity stand. Early morning plant hunters were quick to purchase from both the AGS stall and the four commercial ones, including Ian Christie, who was with us selling plants, as a Judge and President of the Scottish Rock Garden Club.



As the staging was completed inside the hall, the Judges started to assemble, including 15 members of the Joint Rock Committee, who were visiting us for the second time in ten years. A selection of them along with Ulster and Dublin judges worked together under the Show Director of the day – Ray Drew.

After the welcome cup of coffee served by Hilary the serious business of judging was under way – and much joy was expressed by the visiting judges as to the excellent quality and variety of exhibits. As ever



judges, stewards, auditors, and Liam on computer worked efficiently to keep the process moving. A report of the results of the judging by the Joint Rock committee will appear in the Bulletin.

Whilst judging was being undertaken, Mark delighted members of the general public to “planting up” of a trough in the walled garden.

As the judging reached its finale Billy Moore's *Primula bracteata* won the coveted Farrer Medal, and Certificates of Merit were awarded to Harold McBride for *Pinguicula grandiflora* and *Androsace sarmentosa*, and to Liam Byrne for *Ramonda myconi*.



The quality of the artistic exhibits was greatly praised by the photographic

judge, Dr Gordon Gray and we are grateful to him for performing this task for many years.

Each exhibitor in this special anniversary show was a “winner”, as an engraved glass roundel with the AGS logo was presented to them.

A larger than usual Judges' lunch was much enjoyed especially by the 15 “Joint Rockers” and we are grateful to Paddy for her gift, and to Margaret for her generous support.

The superb situation of Greenmount College is made possible by the ever helpful Principal, John Fay, and the Group are most grateful to him and his college staff. Our English and Scottish visitors were most impressed by the wonderful setting and beautiful grounds.

It was a pleasure to welcome a fellow Show Secretary, Lionel Clarkson, from Blackpool who visited our 70<sup>th</sup> show with his wife and also exhibited and attended every function.

As usual Heather was busy throughout the day photographing prize winning plants – so many members doing so many different jobs and all so very much appreciated !

And “my dream” - well the benches were packed with plants and the largest group of general public I ever remember were there to enjoy them and I think they too sensed the camaraderie of the Ulster Group and perhaps some might be tempted to join our society.

That evening a Celebration Dinner was held in the Long Gallery at Parliament Buildings, Stormont, preceded by a drinks reception in the Great Entrance Hall, where guests mingled in the magnificent historic surroundings. An unplanned “extra” was the tour of the building led by Jim Wells MLA who with his lively personality made this a joyful and interesting experience for all.



Short and appropriate speeches were given by Rod Leeds (Chairman Joint Rock), Ian Christie (President Scottish Rock Garden Club), Bob Gordon, Val Keegan, Ray Dray (Assistant Director of Shows), and Harold McBride. The Dublin Group made a presentation of a visitors book to mark the occasion and this will be used to record judges at future shows and guest speakers at our meetings. A celebration cake was cut by Paddy and the Show Secretary (Pat) – and so ended a memorable day – and as guests left the magnificent floodlit Parliament Buildings, memories were stored away of a truly wonderful day by the 72 guests.



The weekend was completed by the ever generous Margaret who with committee members provided lunch and the opportunity for the Joint Rock members to view her beautiful garden – and as the visitors left for airport and further travel they expressed thanks for a wonderful trip.

Pictures of the Show and of the Stormont dinner are on our website, at <http://www.alpinegarden-ulster.org.uk/Shows/Show2009.htm>

The Show committee are most grateful to all who helped and to Harold who came back 'on board' to plan the show. So now records, finances, and reports completed – it's back to planning the 71<sup>st</sup> Show!



## A.G.S. Ulster Scottish Trip 2009 – Vickie & David Lapsley



A.G.S. Ulster Group Tours always start shortly after dawn. Even so, when we got to the Ulster Bus depot before 6.00 a.m. , most of our forty fellow travellers were already there.

The arrival of a brand new vehicle with Dirk, our friend from previous trips, at the wheel, took our early morning blues away. The crossing was smooth, and we were in our first garden a few miles south of Stranraer, twenty-five minutes after docking.

Mr & Mrs Humphries made us very welcome to their small but outstanding garden. Except for the banks running up to the perimeter fence, the plants, almost all of them alpines, were growing in seven or eight raised beds about 24 inches high. A wonderful array of dwarf rhododendrons and other ericacea, created a stunning fringe all round the garden. A warming cuppa on a showery morning sent us on our way refreshed.



Good lunches were to be a feature of the trip, and Hayes Garden Land got us off to a good start. Holmes Farm was an interesting blend of farming and horticulture, with the common factor of excellent husbandry. The plants oozed health and beauty. Irises, over 125 of them, grew in borders with *Allium cristophii* (or a near relation). Among a wealth of perennials two in particular caught our eyes, a sturdy *Roscoea purpurea* and a *Nomocharis* with a dozen white blooms.

The second day took us on the long journey east to Edrom nursery. There were many well planted troughs in the forecourt of the house, and a pleasant series of raised beds with many good plants leading down to the sales area. This was in some respects disappointing. While the plants on offer were of the usual high quality there was not the variety we have come to expect.

In the afternoon we visited the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh, always a mixture of joy and frustration. There is simply not the time in one afternoon for the visitor to see all that is well worth seeing. On the other hand it always uplifts the spirits to walk through areas of great interest and beauty.



Next morning we drove to Helensburgh. Our first stop was at Glenarn, a sixteen acre garden, restored over about twelve years by Michael and Sue Thornley, a husband and wife team of architects. The theme is passionately to co-operate with nature, rather than to impose a preconceived plan upon it. The result is stretches of glorious woodland walks through great historic trees, ancient rhododendrons, and large drifts of primula. Light interplays with shadows in almost mystical ways, to leave an impression of peace and beauty.



We tasted something of the Art Nouveau movement when we visited the Hill House designed by Charles Rennie McIntosh now in the hands of the National Trust. We moved on to Geilston House, another garden on the grand scale, this time with manicured lawns, and well laid out beds and rockeries. It complemented and contrasted with Glenarn, and the combination left us with a day of memorable beauty.

So to Saturday and Gardening Scotland in Ingleston. This is much more

than a Flower Show – the displays of food and crafts, and products not all related to gardening, inside the huge Main Centre, embrace a wide variety of skills and interests. The stands of plants however remain the chief feature, and many of us have come home with quite splendid specimens, some of them several feet high!! And if we still felt the need for some retail therapy, Binny's Plants and Garden to which we dropped in on the way home gave us every opportunity.

Our last day, so often something of a tired trudge home, turned out to be a real feast of lovely places. Our first stop was at Threave Gardens near Castle Douglas which not only offered us a beautiful, wonderfully landscaped large garden,, surrounding an imposing Manor House, but a good selection of well grown plants in its sale area.

Broughton House in Kirkcudbright brought us a step nearer to the ferry. It is a national Trust property with a significant history. We will remember it also for the number of large Dactylorhiza available for sale. Castle Kennedy was an inspired afterthought of Margaret and Kay who masterminded this splendid tour. Here on the doorstep of Stranraer, and surrounded on three sides by sea we enjoyed a relaxing cup of tea, among rhododendrons and splendid walks. It provided a fitting Evensong for a lovely experience.



Greenmount Prize Day

## Andalucian Orchids in Spring

Joan & Liam McCaughey



In March this year, we felt the need of some relief from the winter, and decided that the south of Spain was the only reasonable choice at that time of year. We settled on the Molino del Santo, a converted ancient mill in Benaolan, near Ronda, and an easy drive from Malaga airport. Brian Duncan lent us notes from

his Daffodil hunting in the past, but these also mentioned that there were a few orchids, too. This year was a bad season for daffodils, and although we did find them they were nowhere in the profusion he had seen previously.

At our first stop, an anonymous hillside half an hour from the airport, there were no daffodils, but three different types of orchid. Most plentiful was the yellow *Ophrys lutea*, a pretty little bee-orchid pictured here. However the prize was a beautiful mirror orchid, *Ophrys speculum*, (Picture on the back cover). This was the only place we saw the mirror orchid, but *O. lutea* is very common.

The dull orchid, (bottom left) *Ophrys fusca* was growing here too, possibly *ssp durieui* with blueish speculum area. This common orchid is quite variable, and the plant (bottom right) is perhaps *ssp dyris*, where the speculum is a lighter version of the ground colour.



Our hotel is ideally situated to explore the *Pueblos Blancos*, white villages, for which the region is famous. They date back to when the people were seeking security from the Moors down on the coast. One of the best is Grazalema (right), and the walk above it is excellent for flowers – we even found one daffodil!



Along the path here, under the pines, was a more familiar orchid, the early purple, *Orchis mascula*, which here occurs as a subspecies *olbiensis*, although the plants we saw in this area seemed indistinguishable from the Irish type.

The path leads up to a statue, and below this was *Orchis italica*, unfortunately trodden on.



Next day we went walking in the Sierra des Nieves – the Snowy Mountains – where indeed we had been driving through falling snow on our way to the hotel, but now sunny. The aim was again daffodils, and indeed there were two species, big trumpets which may be *N.hispanicus* and small jonquils. Some *O.mascula* there did look



different, and may have been the local subspecies. Satisfied with this, we took the scenic route home, and just on a bend as always happens, spotted a big *Orchis italica* high on a bank above the road, in perfect condition (Previous page, bottom right).

Driving north out of Grazalema, the road runs along a high ridge (the horizon in the photograph on the previous page) with spectacular views over the limestone landscape. Right at the pass, with vultures circling above, were excellent groups of *Narcissus assoanus*.



Finally, from our Spanish break last year, when we went to the Sierra de Cazorla, and on the way home called into the limestone karst of El Torcal is something you can see growing at home on Killard point, the Green veined orchid, *Orchis* (now *Dactylorhiza*) *morio*, pictured below.



## Information and Programme 2009

To allow for slightly longer articles information is being kept to a minimum - if you have any queries just ask any committee member and a **Big Thank-You** to all who contribute to all the following duties at our meetings.

**Venue** St.Bride's Hall, Derryvolgie Avenue, Belfast - 2.30 p.m.

**Dues** - Local current subscription rates are £9.00 single, £14.00 family, due at the A.G.M. or before the end of the current year. To help our **treasurer, please put your subscription into the envelope provided with your name, title, address, postal code, telephone number and email (if wished), also add "A.G.S." if you are a member of the parent body, all clearly written on the outside or on a slip of paper. Give or post this to Mrs. Margaret Glynn, Hon. Treasurer.** 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.

**A.G.S.** - Join

**Plant Sales** - keep up the support

**Termonfeckin** - Don't forget to book on time

**Shows** - Keep on Showing

**Teas** - keep volunteering

**John McWhirter Fund** - One more committee meeting and hopefully it's ready to run

**Website** - The website is now well established, but we are still constantly on the lookout for new material. So far we have managed to publish a new 'Plant of the Month' each month, but this depends on you contributing - so, if you have a favourite that you would like to share, please send in a picture or three and some text, written in your own style, of course.

**Programme 2009-2010 - Bring your friends and advertise it.**

**2009**

September 19<sup>th</sup> **Ulster Group A.G.M.** Members' Plant Sale;  
Members' pictures of Lake District Trip in 2008

October 17<sup>th</sup> **Dr. Mollie Sanderson Memorial Lecture**  
**Robert Rolfe, Nottingham**  
"Plants Rarely Seen in Cultivation"

November 14<sup>th</sup> **Andrew Fraser, Inverness**  
"Plants of Scotland's Hills"

November 20<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> **Termonfeckin Weekend** – Dublin Group

December 12<sup>th</sup> Christmas Fayre.  
**George Sevastopulo, Dublin**  
"Nei dintorni dei laghi" (Around the Lakes)

**2010**

January 16<sup>th</sup> **Wol Staines, Glen Chantry Garden & Nursery, Essex**  
"Alpines at Glen Chantry"

February 6<sup>th</sup> **John Page, Solihull, W. Midlands**  
"Crevice Plants in the Wild and Crevice Gardens"

February 20<sup>th</sup> **Winter Garden Visit** – Snowdrop Day -  
details nearer the time

March 20<sup>th</sup> **Members' Show;**  
Members' pictures of Scottish Trip in 2009

April 10<sup>th</sup> **Ulster Group Show – Greenmount**

April 24<sup>th</sup> **Dublin Group Show - Cabinteely**

August 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Get-together - details nearer the time





Above : *Ophrys speculum* - Mirror Orchid. Photo : Joan McCaughey

Front Cover - *Soldanella alpina*, Kay McDowell