

ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY

Dublin Group

www.alpinegardensociety.ie



NEWSLETTER NO. 67– WINTER 2017

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Front cover illustration is of *Gentiana hexaphylla* - see p. 37. (Photo: Peter Korn)

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EDITORIAL

2016 was a good year for the Group. We had excellent talks, all of which have been reported on in Newsletter 66, and this one; our visit to the Burren was a great success, and I am fully behind George Sevastopulo's suggestion that we should visit every other year; our weekend in Termonfeckin, despite some shaky moments beforehand, was as good as ever; as was our main show. Our finances are in good shape and we have some new members on the committee. If a similar judgement can be passed on 2017 in a year's time we should be pleased with progress. There are, however, a few clouds on the horizon that members should be aware of.

The number of members not renewing is higher than in recent years, and higher than new joiners, so the total membership is down. The number of members attending lectures is often disappointing, and, as you will read later, numbers at the weekend were down despite a lineup of speakers that could hardly be bettered. On the plus side, exhibitors in the novice section at the show were up, which augurs well for the future but is offset by a drop in the number of entries by some notable exhibitors. We don't have a crisis but we do need to be cognizant of these trends. One reason for these slight declines is the rather high age profile of the membership. We need new younger members, but we're not getting them. This is a problem throughout the AGS and among other similar societies as well. As far as I know no one has so far come up with an answer. I don't have an answer either, save to state the obvious: we need to make the Group more attractive to younger people, and by younger people I am not talking about teenagers, but about anyone under sixty. Please do not think I am being ageist about this because I'm not. At the end of the day this is about the survival of the Group. For the record, if I was to resign the average age of our membership would fall.

Your committee is keenly aware of this problem and obviously would welcome any thoughts that any member might have that would address it.

ALPINE MISCELLANY

Very best wishes on behalf of the Committee to all our members for 2017.

The highlight of this issue of the newsletter is a very fine article on the Burren by George Sevastopulo, inspired by our visit there last May. I think we should follow George's recommendation that our Group, collectively and individually, should become ardent supporters of the region. The opening paragraphs of the article strike a chord with me as they reflect the feelings that I always have when entering the area. The Burren is without doubt a National Treasure, and given our commitment to alpine plants it is appropriate that we become a voice on its behalf. Your committee will consider the practical steps that we can take to make our voice heard. I am most grateful to George for the work that went into producing his article and proud that it is making its debut in the newsletter.

Liam Byrne has once again contributed to the newsletter with a piece on *Calceolaria uniflora* based on his long experience of growing alpinines. Thank you Liam and thanks also to Fionnuala Broughan and Stephen Butler for their reports.

I have a short piece on what is currently my favourite daphne, *D.* 'Arnold Cilharz'. The report on the Termonfeckin weekend is intended as an aide memoir for those who attended, and to give other members an intimation of what the experience is like in the hope that they will be tempted to participate themselves at a future weekend.

Facebook page and Website from Jamie Chambers

The Society's online presence, through our Facebook page and our website, continues to grow in importance. In the three years up to July 2015 we'd had 683 'Likes', an indication of how many people are visiting the page and enjoying it. Since then that number has more than doubled, to 1,473. Even more importantly, when we post some news or information about an event, a lot of people are seeing it. The recent post about the Alpine Weekend in Termonfeckin (with a beautiful *Meconopsis* photo by Martin Walsh) reached 1,772 people. And that

wasn't a one-off. It's now very common for our posts to reach over a thousand Facebook members. Of course many of these are in other countries - members of the SRGC are keen viewers of our page - but it does mean that we are getting in front of potential visitors to the Show or to our lectures, or of prospective members.

I think this is due to a couple of reasons. First, we've been sharing information about other plant-related matters, be they gardening seminars, events run by our sister organisations such as the IGPS and the RHSI, sales by nurseries, or book publications. We do this mainly because we believe our members would be interested, but also because when we share these posts Facebook puts us in front of more people who might be interested in us, which boosts our visitors. So if you know of an event you'd like to put up on our page, something you are going to, or are perhaps participating in, that you think our members would find interesting, just let me know.

Second, we've been posting more ourselves, particularly photographs of flowers, and for that many thanks to Hilary McKelvey, the mysterious Erica Cinerea, and particularly Michael Campbell with photos of spectacular flowers from his alpine house. But the outstanding contributor has been Billy Moore, sharing many photos of plants in his garden. If you haven't seen them yet, go to our page and click on Visitor Posts. And maybe you'll be inspired to post something of your own to share with other members.

Many thanks too to Fionnuala Broughan, who has begun managing the page with me, and her skills and experience are already evident. She's made it possible for you to email the Society directly from our Facebook page: click on the blue Send Email button on the right underneath our profile picture, at the top of the page.

The Society's website has taken a bit of a back seat in recent months, but plans are afoot to include a new section on Getting Started, which will pull together all the information you need to begin Growing and Showing. As ever, we're keen to see new exhibits on the show bench, but we also know that those first steps can be a bit daunting. So this will try and answer all the questions you are likely to have: pots, compost,

watering, growing conditions, and so on, as well as telling you where to find the things you might need. Keep an eye out for this, but I'll be emailing you when it's ready to view.

Show Update, from Gavin Moore

Although the show seems ages away, now is the time to be planning ahead. There are less than six months to go, so if you don't already own your plant then it is really too late to acquire it, with one exception, but more on that later. As the weather gets wetter and colder some plants need attention at this time of year. Alpines don't require protection from cold, and most don't need protection from other elements, show plants, however, are a little different. Some may need protection from excessive wind, hailstones and any other elements that will damage the plant. Remember that plants in pots are far more susceptible to damage from severe frost than those in the open ground. Make sure to seek out any and all possible exhibits and ensure they are appropriately accommodated for the winter.

Last year's show had one of the best Novice Sections that I can remember. At least two of those exhibitors, however, have graduated to the Intermediate Section for 2017 so we need replacements. If you have not exhibited before, I would strongly recommend that you consider doing so next year. If you grow alpines in your garden then you can grow a show plant. At the local show in March we will have some of our hardened exhibitors giving advice to any first timers.

There will be two new sections in the Novice Section in 2017. One will be '1 pan hardy cactus' and the other will be '1 pan planted as a miniature garden'. Miniature gardens are the exception to the six-month rule, as it is possible to acquire and add new plants to a miniature garden right up until the show date. In case you're thinking of assembling an exhibit the day before, these gardens are judged on how natural and established they look. That is hard to fake, but if you plant a garden up now and leave it outside for the winter, it will look quite natural by next April. There are many tips and tricks to creating a miniature garden and they are all outlined in the Winter 2015 Newsletter in Billy's report on a talk by John Dower (click on 'Newsletter' on our homepage:

www.alpinegardensociety.ie). The container can be up to 36cm in diameter so there is plenty of scope for creativity.

Whether it's a miniature garden or something you bought in one of the plant sales last year, please consider putting something on the bench this year. If you need any advice on showing, please contact me or any of the experienced exhibitors in the group.

Heritage Plants

The Irish Society of Botanical Artists and The Irish Garden Plant Society have joined forces in the publication of a book titled *Plandaí Oidhreachta*, which celebrates our Heritage Plants. It highlights the wealth of good Irish Garden Plants and celebrates the beauty of botanical illustration. Last November I attended an exhibition of the original paintings and the launch of the book by Martin Rix in the Botanic Gardens. It is a lovely production and can be purchased online – just google *Plandaí Oidhreachta*. Our own Fionnuala Broughan is one of the artists involved and for me her illustration of *Betula* 'White Light' is one of the highlights of the publication. Congratulations Fionnuala.

Fixtures

Our Fixtures Secretary, Paddy Smith, has once again organized a very interesting and varied programme for 2017 which is listed on page 41. As you know Paddy is stepping down from this position, so the 2017 fixture list is his swan song. I have no doubt that all members appreciate his sterling work over the years and wish him well for the future. The newest member of your committee, Triona Corcoran, has agreed to succeed Paddy and we admire her courage, thank her and wish her every success in this demanding job.

As always we start the year with our **AGM** in St Brigid's on 19 January, and I hope we will have a good turnout. The formal business of the meeting is conducted expeditiously in order to allow plenty of time for the talk which follows. Any questions, criticism or comments that members may have will be responded to fully by the committee.

Our speaker for the evening is **Miriam Cotter** of the Cork Group. Her talk is entitled: 'Seeing the woodlanders from the trees: rare and

interesting woodland plants shaded by a choice canopy'. Miriam is a knowledgeable and entertaining speaker and her talk is sure to lighten a January evening.

On Saturday, 28 January, our **Annual Lunch** will be held in the Royal St George Yacht Club in Dun Laoghaire. The lunch will be preceded at 12 noon sharp by a talk from **Frances McDonald** of the beautiful Bay Garden in Camolin, Co. Wexford, always worth a visit. Frances is a noted plantswoman, lecturer, tour leader, writer and judge, and I look forward very much to her talk on 'The making of the Bay Garden'.

Right in the middle of snowdrop season on 5 February at 1.30 for 2 pm, we will visit the garden of **Mr Terry Levin** in Kilquade, Co. Wicklow. I haven't been, but I'm assured by members who have, that Terry has an impressive galanthus collection which is really worth seeing. The galanthophiles among us will not want to miss this visit, but members not infected will also find it a delight. Directions - southbound on N11, past Glen of the Downs, just past exit 11 (for Greystones) there is a pedestrian overpass and immediately past this is a turnoff signposted for Delgany. Take this left turn and travel for about a kilometre. About 100 metres past Arboretum Garden Centre is a small cul-de-sac on the left. This is Huntsbury and the house is 2nd on the right. There is parking for around twenty cars only so car sharing is advisable.

At St Brigid's, on 16 February the well-known **Malcolm McGregor** of saxifrage fame will speak on 'North America - from Alaska to the Mexican border'. We have had Malcolm before and his talk was very warmly received. He is the author of the indispensable *Saxifrages – a definitive guide...*, editor for the North American Rock Garden Society - the first non-American to hold the post. He has also been editor of the Scottish Rock Garden Club (2000–2006), and the Saxifrage Society (1993–2003). He has travelled widely in search of saxifrages in North America, Europe, Turkey, Morocco, the Himalayas, the Olympic Mountains, Austria, and Italy.

Our **Local Show, Members Plant Sale and Workshop** kicks off at 2 pm in St Brigid's on Saturday, 4 March. I don't know why more members don't attend this excellent event. Those that do always enjoy the plant exhibits, competitive and non-competitive; the plant sale –

good plants, including snowdrops at reasonable prices; and the workshop, which deals with cultivation and showing and anything else that attendees want to discuss. It takes place in an informal and friendly atmosphere so there are few better ways to spend a Saturday afternoon in early March.

Most members will be familiar with the unique Hunting Brook Gardens near Blessington, Co. Wicklow. On 16 March, in NBG, Glasnevin, the proprietor, **Jimi Blake**, will talk to us on ‘A Plantsman’s pick: exciting, long blooming perennials, sourced from the best nurseries in Europe’. Jimi has an international reputation as a gardener and speaker, is a consummate connoisseur of good garden plants, and anyone who attends this talk will come away with additions to their wish list. This talk is joint with the **IGPS**.

A ‘must’ for your diary is Saturday, 8 April, when our main **AGS Show** takes place at Cabinteely Community School from 1.30 pm. Come along, bring your relations, friends, neighbours – all are welcome. Members should bring plants to exhibit and plants for the plant sale. As well as our plant sale, there will be at least seven commercial nurseries selling rare and hard-to-obtain plants on the day. Delicious refreshments will be available at modest prices throughout the Show.

Two weeks later on 22 April, the **Ulster Group AGS Show** will be staged at Greenmount College near Antrim. The two shows only survive because of the mutual support of both groups. Exhibitors and visitors from the South are given a warm welcome so please think of making a day of it.

At St Brigid’s on 11 May, our member, **Gary Mentanko**, will speak on ‘The Flora of sub-Arctic Canada’. Gary is a recent BSc. of Horticulture graduate, and recipient of grants from the AGS and Merlin Trust. He is a plant enthusiast and an accomplished speaker. I have been told by members of the Ulster Group who have heard this talk that it is excellent. We haven’t had a talk on this region before so I am really looking forward to it.

On Saturday, 13 May, we are invited to visit the garden of **Dr Willie**

Reardon, from 2 to 4.30 pm, at 29 Waltham Terrace, Blackrock (off Mount Merrion Avenue). This garden was written up very favourably by Carmel Duignan in the August 2016 issue of *The Irish Garden* magazine, and I had the privilege of a private visit last August which I enjoyed immensely – ours will be the first group visit. Willie tells me that his garden is at its best in late spring, early summer, so our timing is perfect. He doesn't want me to raise expectations about the garden, so all I'll say is that I'm confident that anyone who joins us on the day will not be disappointed.

Paid parking is available in Waltham Terrace on the right hand side coming from the Mount Merrion Avenue entrance. In the event that all spaces are occupied, the road splits at the end, going left to Green Road and right to New Waltham Terrace, a cul-de-sac. There is usually ample car parking available on both of these roads.

On the weekend of 19 – 21 May we are hoping to have a coach trip to some gardens in east Co. Cork. Before making any bookings, however, we will need to have an idea of numbers. At present our enquiries are on the basis of thirty participants. Further information on this trip will be circulated well in advance.

I will provide more information on the autumn fixtures in the next newsletter.

Billy Moore

Calceolaria uniflora

This plant will always be known to me as *C. darwinii* but now must be called *C. uniflora* var. *darwinii*. It was discovered by Charles Darwin on his visit to South America, is a native of Patagonia and is perennial. The flowers are pouch shaped and coloured orange, yellow and red with a white band on the lip. There are a number of varieties, including *C. uniflora minima* and *C. uniflora* var. *uniflora*.



C. 'Walter Shrimpton' is a cross between *C. uniflora* and *C. fothergillii* and is a real gem of a plant.



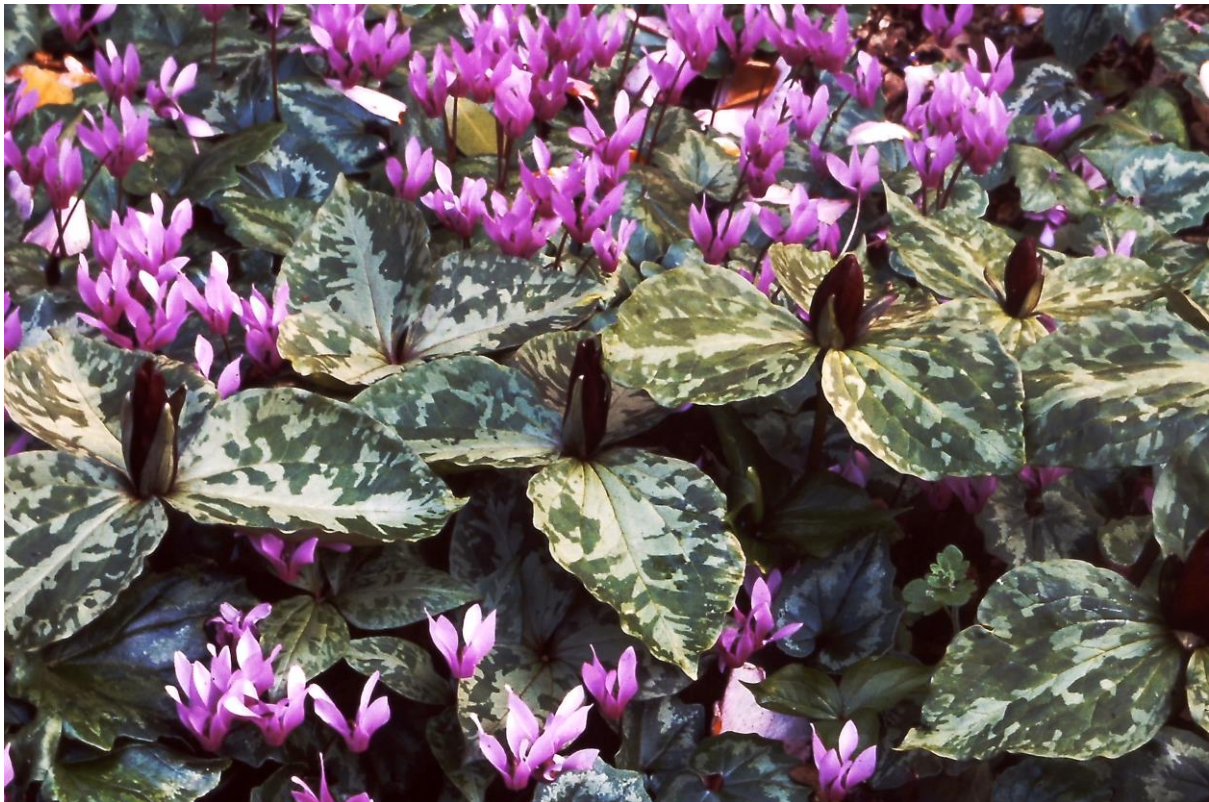
C. 'Walter Shrimpton' shown by Billy Moore at the 2015 Ulster Show. (Photo: Heather Smith).

I grow them in the alpine house but keep them shaded from hot sun. I use a compost consisting of one part loam, acid if possible, two parts acid leafmould, or peat if this is not available, and two parts granite

sand. They like a free-draining compost and do best in deep pots as they have a long root run. Plenty of water while growing in summer is essential but they should be kept just moist in winter. Aphids are attracted to them and any infestation must be dealt with immediately or the plant will die.

Propagation is by cuttings taken after flowering and placed in pots of granite sand. They are easy from seed from a sowing in March using half potting compost and half fine perlite in three inch pots, sowing about nine seeds in each pot and covering with fine perlite which must be kept moist at all times. Prick out the seedlings when there are two pairs of true leaves. It is an ideal plant for the show bench.

Liam Byrne



Trillium cuneatum with *Cyclamen repandum* – see p. 31. (Photo: Kevin Hughes)

THE BURREN

Athlone, Ballinasloe, Loughrea, Adrahan, Kinvara, Bell Harbour, Ballyvaghan – a litany of names along a road that I have travelled many times. Along the way are two places where my spirits soar: west of Athlone where the flat bog land of County Westmeath is replaced by small green fields bounded by dry stone walls; and a rise in the road near Loughrea where the hills of the Burren first come into view.

What does the word Burren invoke? I see in my mind's eye dry, grey, bare limestone pavement, belying the network of subterranean damp fissures and caves below; long straight scailps with ferns enjoying their cool depths; stone walls extending across the terraced landscape; small

bright-flowered plants – intense blue Spring Gentian, magenta Bloody Cranesbill, pink Thrift, yellow Rock Rose, white Spring Sandwort, and swathes of orchids – rooted in crevices and depressions in the limestone and in short turf; green cultivated fields on soils over glacial till; and ancient buildings – Poul nabrone, Cahercommaun, Corcomroe Abbey, Leamaneh Castle – the



tangible records of pre-history and history. I imagine the sound of the crashing of the sea against the glacial boulders at Poll Salach; the stillness of Lough Gealáin below Mullach Mór; the song of skylarks at Fanore, the call of the cuckoo in hazel scrub below Slieve Carran; the heat of the sun on a fine day above Black Head; and the rain, like a shroud, on a wet day at Doolin. It is no wonder that the Burren has attracted countless visitors, amongst them artists and poets such as John Betjeman, Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, Raymond Piper, Frances Poskitt, Sean Scully and Wendy Walsh.

But what is the Burren? The name is an anglicized version of 'An bhoireann' – the place of rock. It is used as a formal geopolitical term



Mullach Mór. (Photo: George Sevastopulo)

in ‘the Barony of Burren, County Clare’. The vernacular use of the word refers to a region of limestone, cropping out as pavement or partially covered by thin soils, which is more extensive than the Barony of Burren. Its northern boundary is Galway Bay west of Kinvara and the Atlantic as far west as Doolin Point but the Aran Islands are identical in geology and contain much of the same flora. Its poorly demarcated southeastern boundary encloses the villages of Kilfenora, Corofin and Tubber. In fact, limestone pavement, in places densely covered by hazel scrub and in some areas carrying elements of the typical Burren flora, is more extensive still and can be traced into parts of east County Clare and south County Galway. The landforms of all of this area are described as glacio-karstic.

The bedrock of the Burren is limestone, deposited during the Carboniferous Period, between approximately 340 and 330 million years ago. At that time Ireland lay just south of the palaeo-equator and the bed of the relatively shallow and warm sea was populated by numerous organisms with calcareous shells and skeletons, such as brachiopods, corals and crinoids. Their remains, later cemented by calcium carbonate, were the raw materials of the limestones and their fossils can be seen at some localities, partially etched out, particularly on the undersides of

loose blocks. The upper surface of the weathered rock, commonly covered by lichens, is in most places grey, but where limestone has been converted to dolomite by the addition of magnesium, such as at Black Head, it is very dark grey. Limestone deposition ceased abruptly and the succeeding black shale, seen well on the coast south of Doolin, and the younger siltstone and sandstone strata that form the Cliffs of Moher support poorly drained and acidic soils whose flora is in sharp contrast to that of the limestones. The black shales immediately above the limestone are rich in iron sulphide (pyrite) and water draining from them is sulphurous, providing the spa water for Lisdoonvarna. The water is also very acid, which has led to the development of swallow holes along the contact between the limestone and shale, well seen on Slieve Elva.

A conspicuous feature of the Burren uplands landscape is the succession of short, steep scarps and long nearly flat terraces, best appreciated where they form the skyline. The scarp and terrace morphology reflects changes in depth of deposition of the limestones as a result of the waxing and waning of glaciers in the southern hemisphere during the Carboniferous. The scarps record progressive shallowing upward during the growth of the ice caps, and, at the levels of the terraces, emergence and the development of soils. The base of a succeeding scarp reflects drowning of the former land surface as ice caps melted. The fossil soils are well exposed in some of the caves but have been washed out at most outcrops. Because they are clay-rich, they form important barriers to vertical movement of water and consequently the base of a scarp is commonly a seep. The amount of water, in turn, is a factor in the distribution of the flora, such as Butterworts, and so events taking place on the other side of the globe hundreds of millions of years ago have controlled the local distribution of some of the Burren plants.

Although a visitor to the Burren will probably perceive the strata as horizontal, aerial photographs reveal individual terraces reaching sea level as they are traced to the south indicating a slight tectonic tilt in that direction. Only in the southern part of the Burren are the strata obviously tilted. The gentle synclinal fold at Mullach Mór is an example.

The rocks of the Burren were progressively buried under several kilometres of younger siltstones and sandstones during the remainder of Carboniferous time and were later uplifted. Compression at the end of the Carboniferous and stress release during uplift resulted in the formation of numerous thin fractures, termed joints. These are generally linear and many trend just west of north.

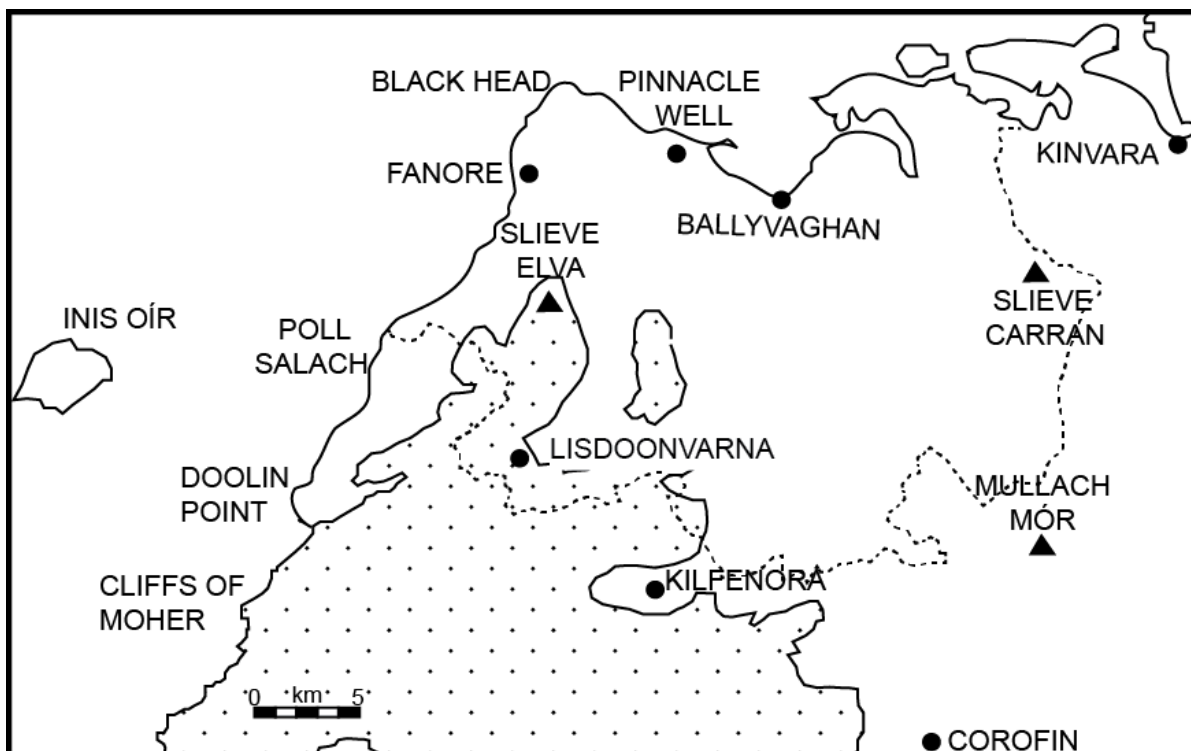
The last episode of geological history of the Burren occurred during the last two million years when the climate of Ireland alternated between cold and more temperate conditions, the so-called Last Ice Age, followed by the Holocene. In the Burren, almost all physical evidence of the Ice Age probably relates to the phase of final deglaciation between approximately 22,000 years before present, the peak of the last glaciation, and 11,700 years before present, the beginning of the Holocene, when there was a sudden and marked amelioration of the climate. Glacial features include glacial till, such as can be seen in the steep slopes along the Caher River, east of Fanore, drumlins - elongate hills moulded by the movement of glacial ice, erratic boulders carried by ice, commonly of limestone but including some far-travelled Galway Granite from north of Galway Bay, and glacial striae, where grains at the sole of a moving glacier have left scratches on the limestone surface.

The Holocene history, derived largely from the study of fossil pollen and from geochemical investigation of stalagmites in the caves of the Burren, is one of changes in climate and vegetation with evidence for the activity of man. Most importantly, it seems probable that originally there was much more woodland than at present. Cleared for agriculture, in part probably by burning, occurred from the Bronze Age onward. The soil cover, while probably thin in many places, was more extensive than seen now. Through the Holocene and before, the limestones were undergoing solution, particularly after glaciation had stripped large amounts of the cover of overlying loose limestone and weathered shale. The most extensive evidence of this is where the tectonic joints described above are exposed at the surface and have been widened by solution to form the scailps (grykes) that are such a characteristic feature of the landscape. The intervening platforms of rock are called clints in

northern England. They also show solution features such as shallow solution pans (kamenitzas) and runnels (karren). At a larger scale, there are swallow holes, dry valleys and dolines, circular depressions ranging in diameter from a few metres to many hundred metres, that formed in many cases by collapse of the limestone roofs of caves. The Carran depression, approximately 9km in diameter, is the largest of these in the Burren.

But what about the plants, the essential appeal of the Burren for lovers of alpinists? The flora does not contain any endemic species but it is unique in Britain and Ireland in the diversity and abundance of plants that an alpine gardener would be tempted to grow. Some of these are true ‘arctic-alpinists’, that is their distribution includes the arctic (generally at low elevations) and mountain ranges, such as the Alps. Others occur in the mountain ranges of Europe but not in the Arctic. Others have a generally more temperate distribution.

Below is a sketch map of the Burren and west Clare, showing the location of some places named in the text. Stippled areas are underlain by shale, siltstone and sandstone; unornamented areas by limestone. Dashed line marks the approximate boundary of the Barony of Burren. Inis Oíir is the most easterly of the Aran Islands.



Of all the Burren plants, the taxon with the most restricted distribution in Britain and Ireland is *Helianthemum oelandicum* ssp. *piloselloides*, which occurs only in County Clare. Its vernacular name is the Hoary Rock Rose and the Burren plants were formerly classified as *Helianthemum canum*. Other subspecies of *Helianthemum oelandicum* occur in Teesdale, England and on the north and south coasts of Wales.



The Spring Gentian, *Gentiana verna*, (above. Photo: Billy Moore) is also very restricted in its distribution outside the west of Ireland: it is known with certainty from Teesdale, in County Durham, England, and there are old records from elsewhere. It is widespread in continental Europe, in the Alps and Dolomites and further afield, occurring reportedly up to an elevation of 2,600m but in many places at relatively low elevations. Equally limited in distribution in Britain and Ireland is Irish Saxifrage, *Saxifraga rosacea* ssp. *rosacea*, which occurs in MacGillicuddy's Reeks, County Kerry, but elsewhere reportedly only in North Wales (a very old record). In contrast, Mossy Saxifrage (*Saxifraga hypnoides*) is widely distributed in Ireland, the western seaboard of Scotland and the Pennines of England. The Burren's most abundant true arctic alpine, Mountain Avens (*Dryas octopetala*) is circum-boreal in distribution and is found in many places along the western seaboard of Ireland and

Scotland. Surprisingly, perhaps, it does not occur on the Aran Islands. This sort of unpredictable distribution is also illustrated by two widespread, boreal arctic alpines, Moss Campion (*Silene acaulis*) and Purple Mountain Saxifrage (*Saxifraga oppositifolia*), both of which occur elsewhere in Ireland and in several locations in Britain, but have never been recorded in the Burren. In contrast, Dense-flowered Orchid (*Neotinea maculata*) and Large-flowered Butterwort (*Pinguicula grandiflora*) are not native to Britain. The former has a Mediterranean distribution from Spain and North Africa to the Balkans. The latter has its northernmost record in the Burren, occurs in County Kerry and in several locations in Iberia, eastward to the Jura Mountains of France. Another Burren speciality is Maidenhair Fern (*Adiantum capillus-veneris*), which occurs almost all over the world but does not tolerate frost. In the Burren it grows in moist, protected, shaded spots, particularly in the scailps south of Black Head. These three taxa are very unlikely to have survived glacial conditions in Ireland and while *Neotinea* and *Adiantum* have minute seeds and spores, which conceivably could have been transported over great distances by wind in post-glacial times, this is not true of *Pinguicula* whose history of immigration into Ireland is a puzzle, because land bridges of the appropriate age between Ireland, Britain and continental Europe have been largely discounted. This biogeographical paradox may also apply to other elements of the Burren flora.

What is the future of the Burren? The threats to what we refer to as the Burren flora, that is intimately associated with open limestone habitats, are many and are difficult to evaluate. They include pressures arising from climate change, agriculture, development and tourism, and invasive species.

Climate change will undoubtedly affect the ecology of the Burren but in ways that are unpredictable.

Agriculture has been and will be a key factor. Anyone who doubts the effects of differing farming practice on the flora, should travel the Kinvara road, east of Ballyvaghan in the early Spring: fields crowded with Cowslips, adjoin bright green, 'improved' pasture that clearly has received large applications of nitrogenous fertilizers and lacks any

Cowslips. The transhumance practice of winterage, where livestock, which graze the lush valleys during the drier summer months, are moved to the higher and better drained ground in October and November (the opposite of the normal practice in continental Europe), has been shown to be an important conservation measure in the Burren. In times past, the livestock grazed the upland grasses during the winter, reducing the competition for the 'Burren flora' before being returned to the lower ground in Spring. Full-time farming in the Burren has nearly disappeared and with it the practice of winterage has ceased. A praiseworthy co-operation between the Irish Farmers' Association and the Department of Parks and Wildlife with financial support from Europe investigated the relationship between farming and the biodiversity of the Burren, and by using financial incentives re-introduced the practice of winterage. The successor to that initial cooperation, the charity, Burrenbeo Trust, now works to connect all the people, local inhabitants, particularly farmers, and tourists, to work for the conservation of the Burren.

Another threat to the conservation of open limestone habitats and one that is probably partly a natural consequence of ecological succession is the encroachment of hazel scrub over the limestone pavement. This is clearly evident in the Slieve Carran nature reserve. Conservationists are faced with the dilemma of intervening in a natural process or losing rare and valuable habitat. Volunteers from Burrenbeo have been active in controlling the spread of hazel in targeted areas.

The threats to the Burren from tourism and development are self-evident. Sadly, mass-tourism involving very large coaches appears not to bring commensurate economic benefits to the local community. In addition, at the regular stopping places of the coaches, such as at Poll Salach, there is anecdotal evidence of wear and tear on the habitat, particularly on the sea-side of the road. The aim should be to promote responsible eco-tourism.

Finally, there are the potential threats posed by invasive species, which have been well advertised in Ireland as a result of the spread of *Rhododendron ponticum*. Amongst animals in the Burren, the only candidates are the feral goats, once thought (probably incorrectly) to

have been important in controlling the spread of hazel scrub. It is unlikely that with the present size of the herds, they have or will have much direct impact on the Burren Flora. They, themselves, could have been the target for conservation measures many years ago, because within the herds are a small percentage of individuals who conform to an ancient landrace, the Old Irish Goat. Interbreeding with more recently introduced breeds means that the Old Irish Goat in the Burren will not be recognizable for much longer. There are two exotic plant species that are so familiar that most visitors consider them native and even emblematic of the Burren. They are *Fuchsia magellanica* and Montbretia (*Crocasmia x crocosmiiflora*). The latter, as every gardener knows, is a thug, but fortunately both are generally restricted to hedgerows and roadside ditches, and do not appear to have developed a liking for the scailps. There is one exotic alpine plant, the Fairy Foxglove (*Erinus alpinus*), which is established at several places in the Burren, including Caher Bridge and the Pinnacle Well, west of Ballyvaghan. It has clearly migrated since its original introduction, but not aggressively so. However, we should not be complacent. The Mexican Fleabane, *Erigeron karvinskianus*, as everyone who grows it will testify, self-seeds everywhere. The walls of the deep ravines that cross the Picos de Europa, in northern Spain are covered with it. There is little doubt that it and many other alpine plants, if they gained a foothold, would find the Burren very much to their liking.

From the perspective of conservation policy, the high ground of the east Burren and a large area of wetlands to the southeast are included within the East Burren Complex Special Area of Conservation, providing protection for a number of habitats and species (plants and animals, some very rare) listed in the E.U. Habitats Directive. Within the East Burren Complex, an area of some 750 square km around Mullach Mór makes up the Burren National Park and Slieve Carran is a Statutory Nature Reserve.

How can the Alpine Garden Society help the conservation of the Burren? First and foremost, the Dublin Group should adopt the Burren as a special project and should try to organise visits there at least every

two years. We should be ambassadors for the Burren to other horticultural groups and the general public, home and abroad. The Dublin Group, as a whole, and individual members can contribute by becoming members of the Burrenbeo Trust. When visiting the Burren be vigilant and bring your concerns to the Trust or to Clare County Council. Stand up for the Burren!

George Sevastopulo

Plant Portrait

***Daphne x rollsdorfii* 'Arnold Cilharz'**

This is a wonderful dwarf daphne, floriferous, fragrant and easy, provided it is given a well-drained but moisture retentive soil in full sun. Cuttings taken in late July will root readily. Raised in 1979 by Fritz Kummert as a cross between *D. petraea* and *D. collina* it has deep reddish purple, strongly perfumed flowers. I have had it in the garden for around five years and have become very fond of it because of its compact habit and the profusion of its flowers. In my experience it is by far the best of the small daphne crosses and I recommend it unreservedly. I got my plant from Aberconwy. My photo was taken in May 2016.

Billy Moore



REVIEW OF RECENT GROUP EVENTS

Unusual bulbs and how they get to your garden', John Amand, 20 October

This joint lecture, organized by the Alpine Garden Society, was very well attended, with 75 people not just listening to an excellent speaker, but eagerly buying from a wonderful range of bulbs and rhizomes that John had brought with him. No time was lost as we went straight onto a long list of John's favourites, and how they are produced, and where, for bulb growing and selling is an international business, and has to be commercial to survive. Production could be in the Himalayas, for example for *Kaempferia* (*Zingiberaceae*) and *Arisaema*, where a partnership with local nurserymen produces a native plant, employing people, and reducing pressure on the wild plants, but most production stories came from the Netherlands of course. Dutch nurserymen have a tradition of being excellent growers, and innovators. Time and again John repeated the phrase 'and excellent as a cut flower' - and this is a major part of the drive to grow the bulbs, for a cut flower crop can be a bonus while growing bulbs for sale, making it profitable, but many, many millions of bulbs are grown purely for the flower, and thrown away afterwards. Selection of new cultivars, noticing the one sport or mutation in a crop of hundreds of thousands, and slow multiplication over many years, is the norm for bulb growers. If a bulb does not grow or sell well, it will not be grown, a harsh life, and before it can be sold you need a 100m long bed 1m wide to have enough to sell, and usually only viable if a lot of the work, the planting and lifting especially, can be mechanized. Small numbers make for expensive bulbs.



I'll give a wee taste of the many excellent slides and stories John shared. *Kaempferia*, in the ginger family, with scented flowers, grown en masse in the Himalayas for export. *Arisaema*, maybe 30,000 bulbs traded per year.

Arisaema candidissimum now with many colour selections being bulked up. Vigorous *Iris* 'Katharine Hodgkin', from an initial six bulbs fifteen years ago, John showed a field with 1.2 million bulbs (approx!) in flower. Dozens of *Iris* cultivars in every colour. One grower specializing in *Fritillaria* has ninety species. Forms of *F. persica* being selected from 320, again cut flower production key, as it is for new hybrids of *F. imperialis* - selected for no unpleasant scent! *Allium* has about 350 different species and hybrids, selecting for vigour means quicker production, but from seed it takes four years to flowering size, if vigorous and suited to bulbil production from basal cuts, then only two years. *A.* 'Globemaster' is grown on thirty acres, mainly for cut flowers again - and to prolong the season the flowers go into cold storage for up to two months. Tulip had to have a mention, with five billion grown each year, many forced under glass in shelved hydroponic systems (no soil), only in full light for the last few weeks, and once in bud they are unceremoniously beheaded for cut flowers with the bulbs dumped - largely by machine. One variety *T.* 'Strong Gold', has 200 million bulbs grown each year for cut flower production. Not just bulbs on show - new hybrids of hardy *Cypripedium*, *Calanthe* and *Spiranthes*, *Eremurus* 'Joanna' at up to 4m tall, and acres of greenhouses (as a sideline!) of *Pleione* showed the range being grown. Modern innovations include cultivation methods that use less chemical inputs. Eelworm is one of the worst problems, one control simply flooded the *Allium* field after the bulbs were lifted, another showed marigolds following tulips, the chemicals in the plants when ploughed in, reducing eelworm numbers.

A fascinating talk, showing the dedication of breeders with years waiting for a good cultivar, the professionalism and skill of the growers producing them, and the Dutch pragmatic business model and willingness to innovate and trial methods.

Stephen Butler

'Some Asiatic Primulas', John Richards, 10 November

It seemed fitting that John Richards should come to talk to us in November, after such a colourful autumn: one of John's (many) interests is autumn colour and he even has a website devoted to it: visit

autumncolour.co.uk for lovely photographs and lots of information. However, John came to talk to us about primulas and it was great to see such a good turnout to hear a renowned expert give us the benefit of the breadth and the depth of his knowledge of this remarkable group of plants. John illustrated his talk with many beautiful photos, most of which were his own, but some of which were attributed to Pam Eveleigh to whose website he referred us for more information (primulaworld.com).

It was tantalizing seeing so many beautiful plants, many of which are not in cultivation. One phrase that John repeated caught my attention: “he flowered it once and then it died”. Many of these primulas are difficult and susceptible to viruses. John stressed how important it is to keep raising them from seed.

Amongst the wide variety of beautiful plants that John showed us - some of which showed the characteristic and remarkable variation in flower colour - the uncanny looking *Primula melanantha* (black, of course) caught my eye, as did *P. candoriana* which has long, almost azure-blue, bell-shaped flowers, and *P. lilacina*, a member of the aptly named



Muscarioides section. But none of these are in cultivation! Still, John did mention some that do okay in gardens, including the stoloniferous *P. moupinensis*, “a marvellous thing”, which grows well in light open ground. *P. griffithii* got special mention as it’s one of John’s favourites, and he also mentioned that both *P. alsophila* and *P. henrici* (formerly *bracteata*) are best grown in an alpine house and can be beautiful show bench specimens.

A final and very useful nugget of information from John was that “primulas like Perlite”: they generally thrive in a nicely open compost.

If this brief account has intrigued you, you can catch up with John at any time on his AGS blog, *A Northumberland Alpine Gardener's Diary*,

which in its 20 November 2016 entry also includes some lovely photos from the garden of his host in Dublin.

Fionnuala Broughan

33rd Alpine Weekend at Termonfeckin 18 to 20 November

Despite being beset by various problems beforehand, the 2015 Alpine Weekend was well up to the usual standard. The biggest problem was that, due to ill health, John Massey had to cancel just a few weeks ahead of the event. He has our best wishes for a speedy recovery. We expected John to be a big draw, and feared that his withdrawal would lead to cancellations. There was also, of course, the question of finding a replacement for him. Aberconwy, due to pressure of work at the nursery, also had to cancel. There was in addition some concern, unfounded as it turned out, that the post-Brexit drop in the value of sterling might deter some of our northern friends. In the event we got a replacement for John thanks to Paddy Smith, ably assisted by Martin Walsh, in the form of Kevin Hughes, who also agreed to bring plants, thus replacing both John Massey and Aberconwy. We had no cancellations due to the change of speaker, indeed, we got an additional delegate who came specially to hear Kevin. We did however have five last minute cancellations due to ill health and family problems. The net result was that numbers were down but this did not prevent the weekend from being a resounding success. The usual convivial atmosphere prevailed throughout, and the delegates made the most of what is a unique opportunity to discuss their hobby with like-minded plant lovers, including the speakers.

Barbara O'Callaghan and her team must be congratulated on the successful outcome. Barbara was unflappable at all times, despite the various setbacks, and ensured that everything ran smoothly. She also prepared the very attractive floral decorations for the dining tables.

Gwenda Wratt's stall was, as usual, a welcome addition. Paddy Smith ran the raffle and Heather Smith again produced a challenging crossword. Val Keegan managed the plant sale, and Miriam Cotter from the Cork

group ran the auction and ensured that she got the last possible cent from the bidders. A number of people, especially Harold McBride, despite the fact that he wasn't with us this year, generously donated plants for the sale and auction both of which provided a boost to the Group's coffers. Jamie Chambers, who chaired proceedings with great aplomb, presented his usual teasing table quiz which is an indispensable part of the weekend and provides after dinner entertainment on Saturday night.

Susan Tindall of Timpany Nurseries along with Kevin Hughes had a fine selection of plants for sale which lightened purses and pockets considerably.

Our thanks are due to all those mentioned, and to everyone else who helped to make the weekend such a success. An Grianán is an ideal location for this event and the friendly and helpful management and staff contribute significantly to our enjoyment, so our thanks go to them as well.

The Plant Forum on Sunday morning was a lively affair where the panel, consisting of Kevin Hughes, Peter Korn, Susan Tindall and Martin Walsh, did their best to answer delegates' questions on plants and gardening problems, a summary of which Jamie will put on the website.

Space constraints permit only a brief description of the six informal slide presentations on Friday evening. Nancy Darby took us to Holehird Gardens in Cumbria, north of Windermere (holehirdgardens.org.uk).

On the evidence of Nancy's photos, it should be well worth a visit. Carl Dacus described an experiment where 100% success was achieved by using Manuka honey to root juniper cuttings! He also took us to Wisley to see the alpine house and the sand bed. Joan McCaughey showed us blazing fields of tulips in Holland from a visit there in March last year. From a visit to the Dolomites in June 2016 she shared some fine shots of good alpines, *Eritrichium nanum* and *Pulsatilla vernalis* being the highlights for me. Jamie Chambers was in Reykjavik last year and took the opportunity to visit the city's botanic garden. He was impressed by the large rock beds with a good range of alpines, and by the educational aspects of a lot of the displays. Heather Smith took us to the Picos

showing us lots of plants, scenic views, wildlife, villages and markets. I especially liked her image of *Gentiana occidentalis* looking very happy in a crevice. The McCaugheys are inveterate travelers as evidenced by a further trip with Greentours to Greece last year. Liam beguiled us with his usual brilliant shots of plants, architecture, landscape, picturesque villages and wildlife, including a rather intimidating Leopard Snake. The title of the trip was 'Bulbs of Sparta', so bulbs dominated, with Narcissus, Crocus, Cyclamen (ok, they're corms), Iris, Colchicum and Sternbergia. The Friday evening slide shows are always interesting and provide an additional dimension to the Termonfeekin experience. Our thanks to the presenters.



Peter Korn, Martin Walsh and Kevin Hughes. (Photo: Billy Moore)

Kevin Hughes

Kevin opened proceedings on Saturday morning with a talk entitled 'Spring flora of the south eastern USA'. This is Kevin's favourite part of the world for plant hunting. Many good garden plants come from the region: they are fully hardy being used to late frosts. It is home to more trilliums than anywhere else in the world.

Kevin's enthusiasm for the region was manifest throughout his talk. It is a very managed landscape, mostly for the better. There is great diversity both in plants and animals. We were all charmed by his photo of the tiny Northern Saw-whet Owl, about the size of a sparrow, with a huge head and amazing eyes. Other animals that appeared were beavers, armadillos, dolphins, alligators, turtles and snakes, the Water Moccasin being the most dangerous snake in the US.

Many of the plants shown by Kevin were woodlanders. He has an interest in woody plants also, especially magnolias, of which we saw a few. *M. fraseri* is lovely and has a great scent. The deciduous *Rhododendron periclymenoides* with pink lemon-scented flowers should be more widely grown. Cyripediums were represented by *C. pubescens*, relatively easy with good drainage, and *C. acaule*, more difficult. *Pedicularis canadensis* is very nice and easy to grow. *Silene virginica* has striking red flowers and grows well in the UK. Of the three arisaemas shown, I liked *A. triphylla*. Erythroniums are more common in western USA but also grow here. *E. americanum* has yellow flowers and likes sun. *Viola pedata* is very widespread but tricky in cultivation; best on a rich, dry bank but slugs are a problem, as they are with the desirable *Mertensia virginica*. Baptisias are good plants, and Kevin particularly recommends *B. australis* var. *minor*. Very nice too is *Podophyllum peltatum*.

We spent some time on trilliums, one of Kevin's favourite genera. *T. aff. ludovicianum* has maroon scented flowers and great foliage and is often seen with the yellow flowered form of *T. cuneatum*, the more usual form having dark maroon flowers. Kevin found a very nice yellow form of *cuneatum* near an illicit still, which he named, appropriately, *T. cuneatum* 'Moonshine'. Also with yellow flowers, which smell of lemon, is *T. luteum*. *T. catesbaei* has lovely pink flowers while *T. flexipes* is white. Also

white is *T. simile*, “a big lovely plant”, and is easy. More difficult is the beautiful *T. undulatum*, also white which is now scarce in the region due to digging. Kevin is very concerned about the widespread poaching of these plants as a result of which a number of species are under threat. *T. ozarkanum* (similar to *T. pusillum*) is now rare in the wild and is on the edge of extinction. The diminutive *T. pusillum* itself is also endangered but is recovering. *T. stamineum* with red flowers is a good, easy plant and a bi-coloured form of *T. recurvatum*, shown by Kevin was very attractive. Surprisingly, some four species of cactus grow near the trilliums; *Opuntia humifusa* is fully hardy.

Endangered also are a number of sarracenia species. Kevin says that they are all easy in cultivation. *Sarracenia leucophylla* is very impressive. Palms are widespread at lower levels and though they are winter hardy it is not hot enough here to grow them. *Hymenocallis florida*, the Florida Spider-Lily, is lovely but is a magnet for Narcissus Fly.

Kevin finished his talk with an image of *Zephyranthes atamasco* (or *atamasca*) which is hardy and easy to grow in moist conditions but needs protection from slugs. He uses a solution of instant coffee to control slugs. Buy the cheapest catering size of instant coffee granules; dissolve a cupful of the granules in nine litres of water; and apply to the area around vulnerable plants, allowing 4.5 litres to a square metre. The solution reduces the slug population without causing any ecological damage, a key factor for Kevin.

Kevin’s second talk was on gardening with bulbs and he took us through the seasons, starting in winter. Bulbs, including corms, rhizomes etc. are his favourite group of plants because they lend themselves so well to successional planting, a technique he strongly advocates.

Winter aconites, *Eranthis hyemalis*, are easy, doing best in a damp situation. *Crocus vernus* and *C. tommasinianus* grow well also, and all three will naturalize readily and are great garden plants, associating nicely with snowdrops, such as *Galanthus transcaucasicus*, or *G. ‘Eling’*, and all are excellent for successional planting. The wonderful *Narcissus cyclamineus* is early as is *Iris bucharica* and *Scilla sibirica*, a sensible alternative to the “dreadful” bluebell, whether English, Spanish or a cross. Daffodils

should be grown in what look like natural drifts; *N. bulbocodium* is essential, a selection called 'Ice Warrior' being particularly good with very long lasting white flowers; *N. bujei* is a good choice also as is the white *N. moschatus*.

Of the Erythroniums, *E. americanum* 'White Beauty' is "a great obliging plant"; some like *E. revolutum* prefer neutral to acid soil but *E. hendersonii* is ok on chalk. *Sanguinaria canadense* likes lime also. *Paeonia veitchii* var. *woodwardii* is a lovely woodland paeony.

Kevin showed a lovely shot (see p. 12) of the dark flowered form of *Trillium cuneatum* in association with *Cyclamen repandum*, a delightful combination. *T. cuneatum* 'Moonshine', mentioned in the earlier talk, looked very nice in a garden setting. Other trilliums shown were *T.* 'Askival Hybrid'; *T. flexipes*; *T. grandiflorum*; *T. grandiflorum flore plena*; and *T. grandiflorum* 'Thunder Mountain', a pink flowered form, best bought in flower.

Arisaemas are great plants. They are long lasting in flower and have decorative fruits and are generally undemanding. *A. nepenthoides* is very nice but *A. utile* is gorgeous. Cyripediums are fine plants too but I have never managed to keep them going for long. *C. formosanum* is lovely, likes acid soil and, according to Kevin is not difficult. Another beauty, *C. macranthum*, needs a perfectly drained mineral soil and is not easy.

Anemone nemorosa 'Blue Eyes' is delightful; Kevin loves it but can't grow it. It's a constant puzzle as to why a particular plant grows like a weed for some gardeners while others are unsuccessful with it. I have no trouble with 'Blue Eyes'. *A. blanda*, which should be in every garden likes drier conditions. Other good anemones are *A. hortensis* and *A. pavonia* with its startling red flowers. *Thalictrum tuberosum* should be more widely grown; Kevin showed us a good Spanish form – George Sevastopulo is the expert on this plant. *Paeonia carthalinica* has lovely dissected foliage which compensates for its rather short flowering period.

We are all familiar with *Tulipa linifolia* but en masse it can be spectacular. It likes a summer baking. Even more spectacular is *T. sprengeri*, which thrives in woodland conditions as well as in full sun. It is the last tulip to

flower but as the bulbs do not tolerate drying out it must be purchased in a pot. It is very easy from seed.

Iris latifolia brings us into summer. *Allium christophii*, partnered with *Gladiolus bysanthinus* makes a pleasing display. *Nectaroscordum spiculum* is “a bit rampageous”, but is fine among grasses. The iris-like *Moraea spathulata* has nice yellow flowers. *Gladiolus* ‘Gonolek’, a selection by Kevin, is named after an African shrike, and has striking red flowers, and is, Kevin says, a good garden plant. (I hope so as I bought one from him.) *G. cardinalis* is another striking plant and does well in a woodland situation where it mustn’t dry out. Kevin finds that *Cyrtanthus epiphyticus* is ok outside but can be decimated by slugs.

Lathyrus tuberosus, a perennial pea, normally red, but there is a white form, is good growing through a tree peony. *Begonia grandis* subsp. *sinensis* is nice growing through hellebore foliage. *Colchicum macrophyllum* demands a very dry spot.

Kevin finished this stimulating talk with *Impatiens tinctoria*, huge, up to 2m x 2m in one season, a hardy, night-scented busy lizzie for sun or part shade.

Our weekend was enhanced by Kevin’s two talks. He is a lively speaker, very conscious of environmental issues, and his talks were full of tips and ideas that will no doubt be tried out by many in the audience.

Martin Walsh

Martin took us on a wonderful trip through eastern Bhutan following the route that he and some colleagues took in June 2015 on their quest to find ‘Sherriff’s Blue poppy’, *Meconopsis grandis* (L&S600), now known as *M. grandis* subsp. *orientalis*. Martin has already described this trip in a fine article in newsletter no. 65, but this talk gave us insights into the adventure that no article could. The meticulous research and planning that went into preparing for the trip showed a professionalism that is rare, and is indicative of Martin’s constant striving for perfection in everything he does. The depth of his knowledge of Ludlow and Sherriff’s (L&S) explorations; his familiarity with the plants; his flawless photography; and his passion for the whole enterprise are admirable. In

this necessarily brief report I will touch on the highlights of the talk and on some of the wonderful plants that were encountered.

Since his first visit in 2002 Bhutan has become Martin's "favourite spot in the Universe". This is not just because of the mountains and the plants, but also because of the fondness that he has developed for the Bhutanese people and their culture. In eastern Bhutan some are quite superstitious and believe firmly in the Yeti, the Sakteng National Park being devoted to the creature. They also have various local deities, whose likes and dislikes have to be considered. At one stage the team spent some time with the Brokpas, an ethnic minority in Bhutan, with a semi-nomadic, matriarchal culture.

The team in 2015 was made up of six people, three women and three men, and their intention was to follow the route of L&S's 1934 expedition. Without their Bhutanese back up team of guides, cooks and porters, led by Sonam Wangchen, Martin's indispensable local contact, the project would not have been possible. While the travelling was arduous with terrible roads, a landslide, a nearly disastrous storm and dangerous river crossings Martin remembers the trip with great affection and satisfaction. Whether that has anything to do with the photo he showed us of himself with two Bhutanese 'wives' or not, only he can tell us. But it certainly had a lot to do with the fact that the team found most of the plants described by L&S.

Martin kept us fully orientated at all times with detailed maps of their various treks but it would be pointless for me to describe them in this report, so I will stick mainly to some of the plants. One of the first was *Lilium nepalense*, unbelievably, growing in a stone embankment! *Roscoea bhutanica*, described in 2000, is very nice as is *R. cf. purpurea* which has smaller forms at higher elevations. *Rhododendron hodgsonii* has good peeling pink bark and occurs in several different colour forms including one with lovely red flowers. *Arisaema elephas* is widespread and is easy to grow.

Meconopsis grandis subsp. *orientalis*, was featured often in the talk to show the wide variation of colour in the species. Other species in the genus, like *M. prainiana*, are equally variable. *Anemone smithiana* is very attractive

and is in cultivation. *Corydalis cristata* (pictured on back cover) is beautiful but is 'tricky' in cultivation. *Androsace globifera* is a good plant but its nice pink-tinted form is not in cultivation. The lovely, fragrant, *Primula waltonii* is probably a subspecies of *P. sikkimensis*.

I haven't yet mentioned the views of the wonderful landscape that Martin photographed throughout the trip, including a great shot of Gangkhar Puensum, the highest mountain in Bhutan at 7,570m, and the highest unclimbed mountain in the world. The views were breathtaking and along with the plants made this talk a visual feast.

We saw fine stands of the monocarpic, yellow *Meconopsis paniculata*, a fine plant, easy to grow, with a highly decorative winter rosette.

The great disappointment of the trip was that when they reached the Nyuksang La pass where L&S had found the blue poppy there were no plants to be seen because of overgrazing by yaks.

Clematis tongluensis is a great plant and well worth seeking out: it is available. *Rhododendron lepidotum* is also very good and can be had from Glendoick Nursery.

Towards the end of the trip the goal was to find two L&S primulas, *P. ludlowii* and *P. sherriffiae* in southern Bhutan and to the delight of the team they found both, the former with the guidance of a very elderly and helpful local holy man. It is thought that *P. ludlowii* may be a subspecies of *P. sherriffiae*. They found *P. sherriffiae*, a primula that had not been seen in the wild for eighty-one years since L&S first collected it.

Martin hopes to return to Bhutan with a view to getting permission to visit Me La, where the poppy was first discovered, to find the original.

I hope he will share that trip with us also.

Peter Korn

Peter's first talk posed the question: Why alpinists have adapted to their specific conditions? He answered the question by explaining in detail how he grows alpinists in his garden north of Gothenburg, and by looking at alpinists in the wild and in Gothenburg and Tromsø botanic

gardens. His main garden is in Eskilsby, east of Gothenburg, and is in the coldest, wettest spot in Sweden; down to -32°C in winter, with acid soil that is poisoned by a very high level of aluminium. He and his partner, Julia Andersson, are developing a new garden in south Sweden in a spot with a more equable climate.

He grows mainly in sand beds with no watering save when planting, but also uses large peat blocks for ericaceous subjects. There are two main areas in the garden, one decorative and the other naturalistic. Like Kevin, he aims for successional planting where possible. Most of his plants are grown from seed much of which is supplied by his brother who is a global cyclist. He has had more than 7,000 packets from this source, most of the seeds collected in Central Asia.

Up to recently he operated a nursery at the garden, selling mostly alpines, however, he found this to be very time consuming and not very profitable, so he closed it, and now does landscaping, including green roofs and walls, for public and private clients.

His opening images were of masses of *Eremurus tianshanicus* on hillsides in Kyrgyzstan (a sight familiar to me from a visit there in 1999) and of *Campanula chorubensis* in a crevice in Turkey.

His sand beds are made with 0.8mm sand piled 20 to 30cm thick. The plants have all soil removed and the roots washed before planting; new plants are watered in and given a low feed at planting and never watered or fed again. It is a low maintenance system of gardening.

The sand beds are top-dressed with coarser material and stones of different sizes are used to imitate nature. Peter uses very large boulders, for aesthetic reasons, but also to create micro climates throughout the beds. He is a strong man and has devised methods which enable him to manhandle these boulders into position. He lays a lot of stress on the importance of providing suitable aspects for the plants ranging from shade to full sun. Always try to imitate the conditions that the plant enjoys in the wild, e.g., sun on the plant but cold and damp at the roots.

To demonstrate the effectiveness of his system he showed us a lot of plants, many of which we find difficult in an alpine house never mind

outside, looking happy and healthy in the garden. Twenty-year-old specimens of *Lewisia tweedyi* were proof enough for me, not to mention flourishing colonies of *L. cotyledon*. *L. longipetala* is an excellent plant, flowering three times each year. He finds *Gentiana acaulis* needs sun to flower well. *Roscoea humeana* stays really compact in sand with large flowers. *Dicentra* 'Burning Hearts' remains reliably perennial in a sunny but cool position.

Large peat blocks, readily available in Sweden, are home to cassiopes and other ericaceous plants and shortias. These are used a lot in Gothenburg Botanic Garden, where Peter has done some work.

He says that *Gladiolus longicollis*, from South Africa, is a very good plant and should be more widely grown. *Calceolaria uniflora* is always short-lived. We saw some gorgeous pulsatillas, including, *halleri*, (photo, p. 40) *heckellii*, with almost black flowers, *grandis* 'Budapest', *vernalis*, *turczaninovi*, and *patens flavescens*, very variable in colour. A compact cushion of *Rhododendron radicans* was lovely as were some penstemons, although Peter finds them short-lived. *P. davidsonii* is one of the best. *Aquilegia jonesii* grows, and flowers, well. As further evidence of the intransigence of South American plants in the northern hemisphere, *Viola cotyledon* did not survive. Primulas, like the tiny, lovely *P. nanobella*, and lilies do well. *Gentiana hexaphylla* (Front cover) is very beautiful. Saxifrages like the sand.

Peter has a special really cool area for some particular plants such as, *Ranunculus glacialis*, *Myosotis pulvinaris* and *Raoulia loganii* and others. The *raoulia* likes a lot of moisture.

It is difficult to say how well Peter's system would work in this country. The huge variable is the climate. Our biggest problem with alpiners is the lack of a long reliable cold spell in winter during which the plants would remain dormant. Peter can provide this dormancy. Also, because there is water on the property, he has devised ways where moisture flows at the plants' roots while leaving the surface dry. Nevertheless, if one has the space, throwing a large pile of sand on the lawn and following Peter's planting instructions should give as good results as you are likely to get from a crevice bed. To help anyone who wants to try we bought a copy

of Peter's book for the library. This was an informative and enjoyable talk.

Peter's second talk was on plants of western USA and was based on three trips he has made to this rather dry area. There is plenty of water in early spring, but much of the land is bone dry from March to October. He grows many plants from here in Sweden, getting a lot of seed from Alan Bradshaw (google alplains).

As well as photos of plants we saw a lot of magnificent scenic shots, some of which looked like alien landscapes with rock surfaces sculpted into extraordinary shapes by strong, sand laden winds. The type of rock varied widely and dictated the varying landscapes that we saw. There were also several fine shots of rich meadows, some just by the roadside.

Peter opened with some woody plants, an arctostaphylos species, of which there are many, with beautiful bark; an arbutus, with lovely bark also; cornus; aspen in splendid autumn colour; and *Pinus monophylla*, the only single needle pine in the world, which Peter thinks would make a good garden plant. We also saw many cacti, large and small, some beautiful, many of which would be winter hardy, but not in the open ground in this country because of excessive moisture.

Apart from the cacti there is a wide range of alpiners in the region and Peter gave us a comprehensive overview of them. I can only mention some of the fine plants that we saw and I hope my selection will give you a feel for the alpiners of the western USA.

Kelseya uniflora is a well-known alpine, not often seen as it is difficult. Peter showed us specimens that were metres wide. *Asclepias* is one of his favourite US genera; it is a hoyia relative. *A. cryptoceras* is a very impressive plant with good foliage and flowers. Penstemons are roadside weeds and are in abundance and seem to need disturbed soil. *P. angustifolius* has blue/purple flowers; *P. laricifolius* is lovely and would do well in a pot in the alpine house; *P. eriantherus* has very large flowers but is short-lived; *P. cardwellii* is a good, long-lived garden plant; *P. caespitosis* is one of the most beautiful, but Peter finds it difficult to keep in character

in the garden; and *P. viride* is small, a nice blue and is a good garden plant.

Sphaeralcea coccinea needs a hot dry spot to thrive and *Ipomopsis aggregata* is long flowering; both are very nice. *Arenaria desertorum* is growable as is *Astragalus kentrophyta*, but it doesn't like disturbance and is not easy in a pot. There are a lot of different species of eriogonum, some nicer in seed than in flower. They are worth trying but will not tolerate winter wet. *E. ovalifolium* is nice. *Leptodactylon pungens*, a phlox relative, is very fragrant. *Castilleja linarifolia* is not easy in pots either, but *C. applegatei* has good red colour and should do well in the garden. *Calochortus gunnisonii* is attractive and should be easy. *Lewisia rediviva* is an alpine house plant with large flowers, well worth growing, as is the tufted evening primrose, *Oenothera caespitosa*. Dodecatheons are generally easy and worthwhile.

Peter showed us several good delphinium species; he advises that they should be treated like bulbs – they need a summer baking. *Aquilegia caerulea* var. *ochroleuca* is easy and lovely as is *Phlox multifida* in selected forms. *Pellea glabella* subsp. *occidentalis* is a tiny fern, ideal for a trough. *Hymenoxys acaulis* is a lovely yellow daisy but is short-lived. So is *Phaecelia sericea* though Peter considers it a good garden plant.

Pulsatilla patens is a great plant and we saw abundant stands of it. The delicate *Clematis columbiana* var. *tenuiloba* is lovely as are a couple of mertensias, *M. viride* and *M. alpina*, but are loved by slugs. *Trifolium nanum* needs a cool position with good drainage, while the lovely *Eritrichium aretioides* is very difficult.

In a general comment on growing alpines, and why some are easy and others almost impossible, Peter reiterated an earlier comment that we must always have regard to the conditions the plant has in the wild, and that most alpines should be grown in poor soil, or, I presume, in sand.

This was another excellent talk delivered by a knowledgeable plantsman with a real passion for his subject. Peter will be back.

Next year our speakers for the weekend will be Kenneth Cox of Glendoick Nursery, Tim Lever of Aberconwy Nursery and Ian and Maggi Young, who need no introduction. Indeed, Ian has been one of

the most popular speakers we have had – I think this will be his fifth visit. I am anticipating a large audience.

Billy Moore

Christmas Miscellany, 1 December

The Christmas spirit prevailed at our last fixture of 2016 aided by mulled punch (non-alcoholic) and mince pies (with cream!). Following a preview of our programme for 2017 by Jamie we had slide presentations from Frank Lavery; Fionnuala Broughan; Barbara O’Callaghan; Patricia Maguire; Bernard van Giessen; and myself, in that order. Frank took us to South Africa, Portugal, Holland, the Burren and to his own garden where he showed us a very fine specimen of *Cyananthus lobatus* in glorious flower. We had some nice photos from Fionnuala taken in Tourin House and Gardens in Co. Waterford; in Co. Donegal; and in her own garden, as well as an informative collage about her lovely painting in the Heritage Plants book mentioned on p. 7. Barbara recalled her visit to Lake Garda, the Dolomites and Monte Baldo and finished with a shot of the beautiful *Gentianella anisodonta* subsp. *calycina*. Patricia guided us through a number of very good Tipperary gardens, including that of Mildred Stokes which particularly impressed her. We also saw some of the special plants that she grows in her own lovely garden. Bernard showed some super shots of Jimi Blake’s garden as well as the entries in the Burren photo competition. I finished with a look at some front gardens in San Francisco.

Gwenda Wratt had a range of cards and other items for sale and she did a brisk trade.

Christmas wishes were exchanged as we headed out into a frosty night, looking forward to 2017.

Billy Moore



Pulsatilla halleri – see p.16. (Photo: Peter Korn)

FIXTURES

Thursday, 19 January, 8 pm. AGM followed by **Miriam Cotter**, 'Seeing the woodlanders from the trees: rare and interesting woodland plants shaded by a choice canopy'. St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

Saturday, 28 January, 12 noon. Annual Lunch, preceded by **Frances McDonald**, 'The making of the Bay Garden'. Royal St. George Yacht Club, Dun Laoghaire.

Sunday, 5 February, 1.30 for 2 pm. Visit to see snowdrops in the garden of **Mr Terry Levin**, Kilquade, Co. Wicklow.

Thursday, 16 February, 8 pm. Malcolm McGregor, 'North America - from Alaska to the Mexican border'. St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

Saturday, 4 March, 2 pm. Local Show, Members Plant Sale and Workshop. St. Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

Thursday, 16 March, 8 pm. Jimi Blake, 'A Plantsman's pick: exciting, long blooming perennials, sourced from the best nurseries in Europe'. NBG, Glasnevin. Joint with **IGPS**.

Saturday, 8 April. Dublin Group AGS Show, 1.30 to 4 pm, Cabinteely Community School, Dublin.

Saturday, 22 April. Ulster Group AGS Show, Greenmount College, Antrim.

Thursday, 11 May, 8 pm. Gary Mentanko, 'The Flora of sub-Arctic Canada', St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

Saturday, 13 May, 2 to 4.30 pm. Visit to the garden of Dr Willie Reardon, 29 Waltham Terrace, Blackrock, Co. Dublin.

Saturday, 19 - 21 May. Coach trip to Cork gardens.

Thursday, 19 October. Julian Sutton, 'Making sense of the Iridaceae'. NBG, Glasnevin. Joint with IGPS.

Thursday, 9 November, 8 pm. Neil Huntley, 'Alpines with Altitude'. St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

17 to 19 November, 34th Alpine Weekend. Kenneth Cox, Tim Lever, Ian & Maggi Young, An Grianán, Termonfeckin, Co. Louth.

Thursday, 7 December, 8 pm, Christmas Miscellany, St. Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

More details about the fixtures can be found on p. 7.

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

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Corydalis ecristata See p. 34. (Photo: Martin Walsh)