Campanula ramosissima (above), a colourful wayside flower; a view of Mamousia (below right)

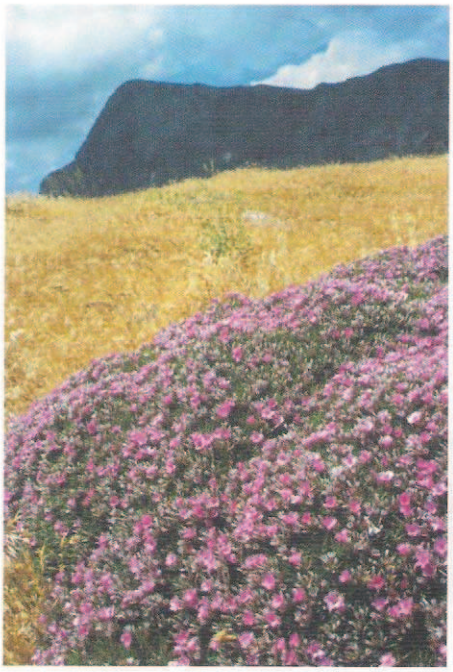
hairy borage *Rindera graeca*. Around the low junipers are pink spikes of *Orchis spitzelii*, the pale yellow *O. pallens* and both colour forms (yellow and pink) of *Dactylorhiza sambucina*. Amongst the rocks of the ridge we find *Cyclamen peloponnesiacum*, *Teucrium aroanium*, greenish or pinkish *Hesperis laciniata* and the delicate blue *Asyneuma limonifolium*. Following the ridge towards the north, on hard limestone the spiny cushions of *Acantholimon androsaceum* are beautifully covered with pink flowers at the end of June. This local alpine is the larval foodplant of two scarce small butterflies, the Odd-spot Blue and the Fiery Copper, and this area is, unfortunately, a target for collectors coming from all over Europe.

To have a more complete view of the local flora it is necessary to go into the upper Styx valley. The path which starts from the village of Mesorougi is dangerous and it is better to go up above the refuge and then down into the valley. The forest track which goes to the refuge is usually good enough in June to be driven with a normal car. We park just below the refuge and go on walking, following the track for an hour until it reaches the ridge at the bottom of a huge

Some flowers of the northern Peloponnese: *Lathyrus grandiflorus* (top left); *Orchis pinetorum* (top right); *Linum elegans* (middle left); *Globularia stygia* (bottom left)

rock at 2250 m. On this rock grow *Saxifraga sempervivum, S. scardica, Arabis bryoides* and *Potentilla speciosa* with silvery leaves. At the bottom and around, fertilised by sheep manure, grows one of the best plants of Chelmos, endemic to some high mountains in southern Greece, the dwarf mullein *Verbascum acaule*, with red buds and stemless yellow flowers in the middle of a rosette of dark shining leaves.

The path starts to go down into the valley through overgrazed grasslands, a good place for *Crocus sieberi* and the endemic *Corydalis blanda* subsp. *oxelmannii* (formerly *C. parnassica*) but with few other plants. The flora is, on the contrary, well preserved after the first rocky outcrops, a natural boundary for the flock of sheep. In the grasslands grow *Linum aroanium*, *Veronica thymifolia* (either deep blue or pale pink), the yellow



Hummocks of *Acantholimum androsaceum* (above) on Mt Chelmos (see p. 211), along with *Saxifraga scardica* (right); *Verbascum acaule* (bottom right) is endemic to the southern Greek mountains

Pedicularis graeca and the scarce *Solenanthus stamineus*, a tall borage with dark red flowers which is also found around the ski centre. On the rocks grow *Aster alpinus* subsp. *cylleneus, Draba lasiocarpa, Aubrieta deltoidea, Valeriana crinii*, the small *Euphorbia herniariifolia* and the rare *Arnebia densiflora* in one of its two European sites (the other on Mt Giona). Damp and mossy places along the stream host *Gentiana verna, Pinguicula crystallina* subsp. *hirtiflora* and *Primula acaulis* (= *P. vulgaris*).The path becomes a little difficult and we have to be careful to reach the small cave at the bottom of the impressive cliff but it is really worth a visit if you come to Chelmos in mid-June. Half of the cave is occupied by the pretty and scarce columbine *Aquilegia ottonis* subsp. *ottonis* and yellow *Saxifraga sibthorpii* grows on the moist ground among the rocks. Water pours from a cleft into a rock basin where the hero Achilles was immersed by his mother to become immortal. Unfort-unately, as legend has it, she was holding him by the heel and forgot to bathe this part of his body. I once met a party of Greek hikers who told me they

Aquilegia ottonis subsp. *ottonis* (above) and *Aubrieta deltoidea* (bottom left), both photographed by the author on Mt Chelmos

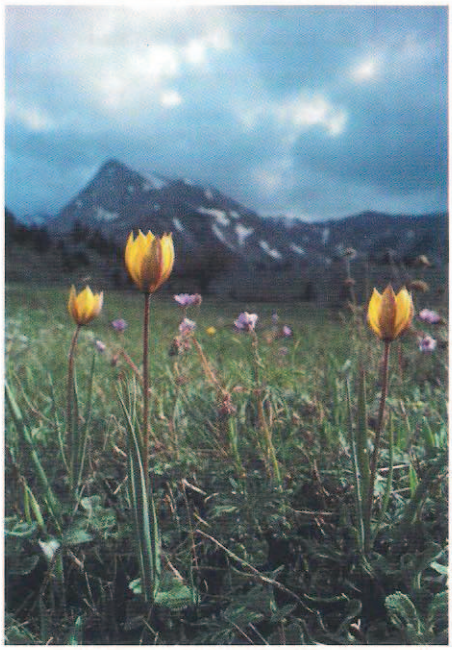
climbed there every year to drink this 'water of immortality', a pilgrimage to ancient mythology.

Mt Saitas, 1200-1811 m, 22nd May 2004

Our clearing is still in the shade of the tall fir trees when we wake up this morning. The sky is deep blue above the lake of Pheneos which shines below our camp: perfect weather to make an ascent. We have chosen to visit Mont Saitas and a short drive on the road to Klitoria brings us to a pass where we find a large track which gently climbs over the north-west facing slope.

On the rocky banks grow nice clumps of the white-flowered *Minuartia attica*, several campions (*Silene behen, S. vulgaris, S. conica*) and a few orchids in the grassy

edges: the very widespread *Ophrys sicula* and *Orchis quadripunctata* and the more local *Cephalanthera longifolia*. We have to reach the first doline at around 1400 m to discover the two most exciting plants of Mt Saitas and the target of this walk: the large bright yellow flowers of *Adonis cyllenea* and the dark purple spikes of *Biebersteinia orphanidis*. Both species, originally collected on Mt Killini by Orphanidis in 1851, were later believed to be extinct. *Adonis cyllenea* was rediscovered on nearby Mt Oligyrtos by the Greek botanist G. Sfikas in 1976. *Biebersteinia*, a strange member of the Geraniaceae of uncertain affinity, has never been found again on Killini but only in a few localities in south-central Turkey. It was found again in the Peloponnese only in 1996 when D. Vassiliades and Th. Constantinidis explored Mt Saitas, where it grows in a



Fritillaria mutabilis (top), a Greek endemic; *Tulipa australis* (=*T. sylvestris* subsp. *australis*, bottom right) has a wide distribution in the mountains of southern Europe; the rare *Biebersteinia orphanidis* (left)

few dolines at 1400-1500 m. They also discovered an impressive population of *Adonis cyllenea* estimated at 40,000 plants.

Walking back to the track along the woodland edge, a less showy plant causes me to stop for some photos: *Fritillaria mutabilis*, with single greenish-red, bell-shaped flowers. The track goes on climbing through the forest, dolines and across grassy, stony and rocky slopes which are also colonised by the stunning *Adonis*. The clayish bottom of some dolines is covered by a tall buttercup with large leaves, *Ranunculus brutius*. Two smaller relatives prefer stony soils nearby, *Ranunculus psilostachys*, with large flowers and leaves which are silvery-grey underneath, and *R. sprunerianus*. Several choice plants grow in the rocky area around the main peak: the small yellow pansy *Viola mercurii* (a local endemic to the mountains of the Peloponnese), is common here with pink-flowered *Prunus prostrata*, a pretty shrublet creeping over the rocks. We sit for lunch on the top where two woodlarks sing whilst a pair of kestrels try to chase a raven away. We walk down slowly in the peaceful afternoon and I explore slopes and dolines to enjoy a little more of their beautiful flora. After such a productive day we are happy to find our tents and to grill tasty lamb chops on a bonfire.

Once thought to be extinct, *Adonis cyllenea* (above) has been found in several colonies in recent years, most notably on Mt Saitas (right). Although very local and listed in the Greek Red Data Book of endangered species, this attractive buttercup-relation is now well-established in cultivation, flowering in its third year from seed.

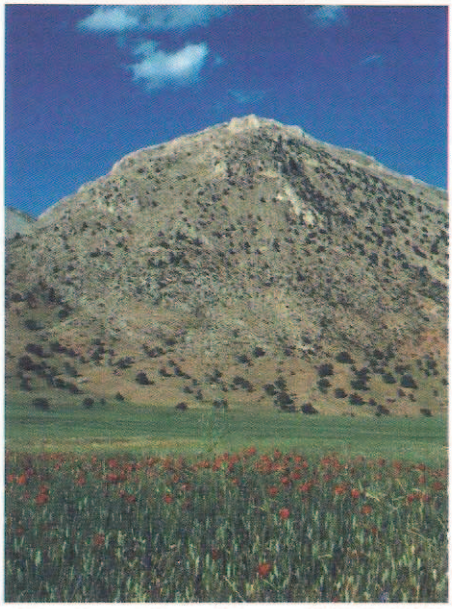
The mystery *Tulipa*, allied to *T. australis*, seen on Mt Klokos (see p.207)

Mt Dourdouvana, 950-2109 m, 23rd May 2004

The weather is glorious again today. Our camp is right at the bottom of Mt Dourdouvana, giving us a chance to explore a mountain about which I have no information at all. Will we find some exciting surprises ? The track goes first through a dense and dark forest of Greek Firs where we find the brown orchid *Neottia nidus-avis* just starting. Another twelve species of orchids are found during the course of the day, most of them in the small clearings in the mixed pine and fir forest. The best is definitely the black and white *Ophrys leucophtalma* (perhaps only a form of the variable *O. mammosa*), never recorded before in the Peloponnese, and the small greenish *O. hebes*. The main track ends near a water tank where a narrow path starts. On friable limestone we are glad to see *Hammatolobium lotoides*, a local prostrate legume with red buds and yellow flowers, and the small rock-rose *Helianthemum hymettium*, named after Mount Hymettos

Ophrys leucophtalma (left) is rare in Greece; red-budded *Hammatolobium lotoides* (below), a local plant in the Peloponnese

near Athens. At about 1500 m, our path traverses a pass between the plain of Pheneos and the valley of Klitoria. The slope rapidly becomes steep and stony and it is now hot. My young daughter has been very brave but she needs a stop and we have lunch under the last trees at 1800 m. Once refreshed, my son and I go on to the top. The ascent on the stony slope is not the easiest but we can enjoy the short blue spikes of *Muscari botryoides* and the last flowers of two early spring bulbs: *Gagea fistulosa* and *Scilla bifolia*, both only found in Greece on high mountains in the south. When we reach the ridge, the view is breathtaking : we are just above the flat plain of Pheneos with its rectangular fields, while majestic Mont Killini stands in front of us. Walking on the sparse grassland on the ridge, in the fresh air, is wonderful. Between the rocks we find *Viola mercurii* and *Saxifraga*



Two views of the easily-accessible Mt Killini, one of a number of botanically interesting mountains in the northern Peloponnese

Lysimachia serpyllifolia

adscendens but no other alpine plants. When we reach the top, clouds hide the sun and it becomes suddenly chilly but we wait for better light to take photos, listening the while to the music of the bells of a flock of sheep in the distance. Another peaceful rest before going down to our car and back to civilisation, at least for a week!

Mt Killini, 1540-2374 m, 29th May 2004

Access to Mt Killini is easy. A good forest track from Trikala leads to a flat area at the bottom of the main peak. A marked path to the refuge goes to the barren summit of Plakes in two hours and a half, not including the many stops to botanise! The whole walk is above the tree-line, first in a gully whose slopes are covered by the spiny shrublets of *Astragalus thracicus,* with low bushes of *Crataegus pycnoloba* protecting the white stars of *Ornithogalum atticum*. We reach a grassy shoulder and the path follows a gentle ridge to the bottom of the stony conical peak. Another star-of-Bethlehem, the stemless *Ornithogalum sibthorpii,* grows in the very short turf with creeping *Astragalus depressus*. There are still flowers of *Crocus sieberi* and *Scilla bifolia* in the damp hollows where the snow has lingered.

The last part of the walk, on the stony and rocky slope, is definitely the most interesting. Soon after disturbing a pair of rock partridges I encounter a 'mythical' plant, the endemic *Verbascum cylleneum*, which is just starting to bloom; a careful exploration of the slope during the next few hours reveals a healthy population between 2000 and 2360 m, especially in places where sheep stay. This small mullein has always been considered very scarce: the French botanist Quézel could find only a couple of plants in 1963 and Polunin subsequently wrote that it was 'probably extinct'; it seems to be

Orchis spitzellii

Asperula boissieri photographed on Mt Killini

restricted to the eastern slope of the main summit. The screes also host the pretty *Ranunculus brevifolius*, while the crevices in the rocks hold nice clumps of *Myosotis alpestris* and *Viola chelmea,* including some white-flowered ones.

During another visit later in the season (on 16th June 2001), we found on the screes *Lysimachia serpyllifolia* with bright yellow flowers and on the rocky grasslands *Drypis spinosa* (a spiny cushion with star-shaped, white flowers), *Erodium chrysanthum, Linum aroanium* and dense mats of *Asperula boissieri.* Above the refuge there were a few plants of *Sideritis clandestina*, one of the labiates used to prepare mountain tea, a tasty hot drink very popular in Greece and in neighbouring countries.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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