

Arunachal Pradesh May 20 – June 5, 2015



After three and a half days of travel, we finally arrived at our first stop in northeast India: Dibrugarh, Assam, India. Once we dropped our bags in our rooms, I looked out of the back window of the third floor and caught my first glimpse of the mighty and fabled Brahmaputra River.



This was the view out of the opposite end of the hotel...the busy downtown of Dibrugarh. Dibrugarh seems to be a fairly large city, but with very limited accommodations for visitors. We flew in and out of this city and on our return trip we stayed at a very nice century plus old British tea plantation.



On our way out of Dibrugarh, Assam and on to AP.



Our greeting from the Department of Horticulture as we crossed into AP.



Trying to offload our car after crossing the river on the ferry. Couldn't quite get close enough for a smooth unloading.



Mishmi Hill Camp.

Our accommodations on the way up to the Mayodia Pass and coming back down from the pass. Amazingly serene setting.

The entire place is made of bamboo and is raised off the ground in an attempt to keep snakes out of the living quarters. Mosquito netting at night is a must.



*Arisaema consanguineum* (above) found in flower at lower elevations on the road up to the pass. About 3,500'.



*Arisaema* aff. *decipiens* (above) standing 3' tall with a beautifully mottled stem and large, leathery foliage. Found growing at 4,200'.



*Begonia* sp. Found growing at 4780' on the road up to the pass.

More *Begonias* found a hundred yards up the road...



The top and bottom of another Begonia sp.



And finally, the largest of them all...Begonia sp. 4,780'!



All of the previous Begonias we encountered on the road up to the Mayodia Pass. We started seeing them growing along the roadsides at about 3,500' and they continued to up to about 5,000'. All but one of the Begonias did have some sort of a rhizome at the base, but grew in a nearly frost free (completely frost free at the lower end of the range we saw) area. Hardiness is unknown.



Impatiens sp.



The luxurious Mayodia Coffee House (7,000' and our shelter). Didn't smell quite like Starbucks inside.

Some of the other plants we saw while hiking along the road between the Mayodia Coffee House and the Mayodia Pass (8,760').



Acer sp.



Acer sp.



Magnolia rostrata in bud and blossom near the top of the ridge. We observed very nice specimens towering 80' tall as well as excellent regeneration of seedlings at various stages of life.



Beautiful (potentially new) species of crested Iris brightened up a very rainy day.



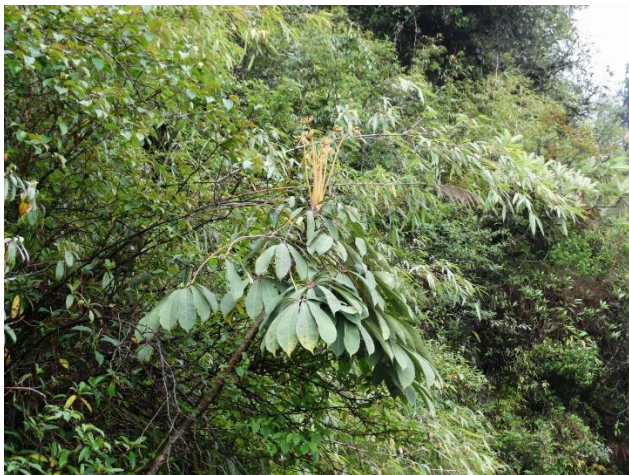
While there were probably dozens of species of Rhododendrons all around us, this was the only species that was still trying to flower for us.



Edgeworthia sp.  
This plant was growing in large thickets out in the open above 6,000'. They had blossomed very heavily and were covered in spent flower heads hiding clusters of green seed.



A stunning *Hydrangea* aff. *aspera* was found growing near the ridge. All of the plants in this area seemed to have beautiful red new growth with prominent red veins on the upper and lower leaf surface along with the remnants of a large lace cap flower.



*Schefflera* sp.



*Exbucklandia* sp. (maroon new growth)



Viburnum sp.



Styrax sp. with large, fragrant, waxy flowers. We only saw this once at 6,800'.

The shelter where we ate at the top of the Mayodia Pass. The Maya Hotel. 5 stars. Any port in a storm.



Breakfast. Actually, pretty darn good.



View from the ridge above the Mayodia Pass 8,880'.

Once we arrived at the top of the pass, the plants became even more interesting... What was also interesting was the account of the weather that occurs there. As we walked the road up to the actual pass, there was a guy in uniform standing on the side of the road. We said hello and he smiled and asked where we were from. He was one year into a two year stint with the Indian army way up there with five other guys living in these igloo looking structures. There was a communications outpost up there that they were in charge of. He said that in the winter time, they can have 5' of snow on the ground. Amazing given the plants that were living there.

*Polygonatum brevistylum*



*Polygonatum autumnale* (pictured below in seed)



Thanks to Aaron Floden for identifying the Polygonatums and Smilacinas. There are certainly several more species growing in the area, but they are hard to spot as they grow either on steep slopes amongst other ground covers or as epiphytes in dense moss growing on an ancient trees.



*Smilacina oleracea*



*Smilacina* aff. *fusca*

*Dysosma* sp.

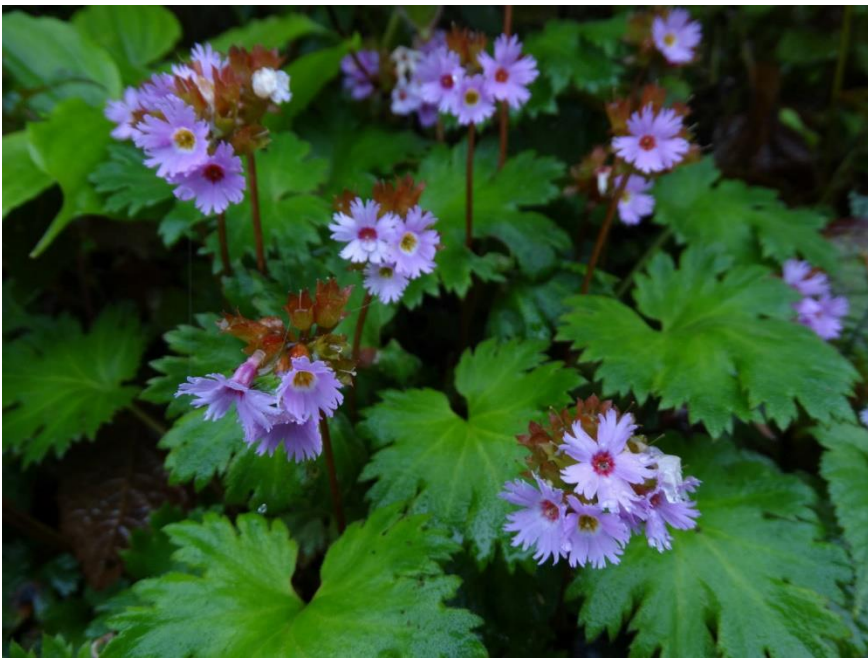


This was the largest patch of *Dysosma* I have ever seen in the wild. Usually we see only single plants growing in the woods (which we did see on the ridge), but this clump had found its way to a partly sunny slope and was thriving.





Mahonia sp.



Primula sp.



Schizandra sp.



Rosa sp.

Very nice, low growing rose with mildly fragrant, single white flowers.



This is one of two species of *Arisaema* we saw that are completely new to science and are currently being described. Notice how the extremely long spadix dangles over the center leaf and down just about to ground level.



And this is the other new species of Arisaema we saw fairly close by. This one has very large leaves with a distinct red margin, outstanding vein pattern and irregular black spotting. Very impressive plant.



I can't write this report without showing a photo of the most prominent critter on the mountain. The leeches in this area were far and away the worst I have ever experienced. They normally live on the buffalo like animals that live in the hills called Mithuns, but when new blood comes around they are ready.

Almost back to camp.



Home sweet home: Mishmi Hill Camp. The small encampment at the base of the mountains.

Stop II: Udayak Pass 5,000'

This area topped out at 5,000' and, by the looks of it, didn't receive much in the way of cold temperatures. The idea was that rather than going back to Dibrugarh via the same route we came up on, we would go back a different route so we could have a look at another area for potential exploration. I don't think this area would be a good match for us in zones 6/7 in the US, but it did prove to be another Begonia hotspot.



Top of the pass. This 100 yard stretch was home to at least 6 different Begonia species.



Begonia sp. 5,000'



Begonia sp. 5,000'



Begonia sp. 5,000'

Another amazing species of Begonia with large, lustrous foliage and standing nearly 40" tall.



Hard to see, but the top of the plant comes to the bottom of James' (blue coat on R) right hand.





*Smilacina* aff. *fusca*

Aaron tells me this is the real thing. The photo on p.15 of this report shows what is currently listed as the same species, but Aaron may soon write it up as a new species.



*Saurauia roxburghii*. I've never heard of it either, but it was very pretty.



Begonia diversity in the Udayak Pass area.



View from Udayak Pass.

In summary, the mountains of Arunachal Pradesh offer many challenges for trekkers, but even more challenges and opportunities for plant exploration. The area around the Mishmi Hills, which eventually lead into Myanmar, seems to be very similar to the weather we seen in the southern US, with the exception of extreme heat that we do occasionally experience in the south. Famous botanist and plant explorer, Frank Kingdon Ward, made 25 expeditions to this general area over a period of almost 50 years, but over the past 85 years, fewer than 10 documented trips have been made back to these hills. More work must be done, not only in AP, but in all of the Seven Sister States of northeast India, to help further the understanding of what is growing and living in this remarkably pristine area.