

International Rock Gardener

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Many people have great pleasure in taking a foreign holiday to visit the flowers in the wild. Recently it seems that there has been a fashion for trips to China and South America; flower-rich though these areas of the world may be, journeys to these places are well beyond the means of most of us. Travel to the alpine areas of Europe can be more affordable and the plants there are as beautiful as they were many years ago when such travel first became popular. For those of us who cannot travel to see the plants in the wild, it can still be fun to see the plants in habitat and learn a little more about the conditions there. David Sellars who lives on the wet Pacific Coast of British Columbia, Canada, is an experienced hiker in North America and Europe and he hopes to encourage others to get

out and see the mountains and the flowers for themselves.

Cover photo: *Eritrichium nanum*. Photo David Sellars

---Gardens in the Mountains---

Cresta de le Sele: A high point for alpine flora text and photos [David Sellars](#)

Imagine the ideal alpine flower walk. It would have an abundance and richness of choice alpiners growing in crevices of different rock types. The rock outcrops would be arranged along a narrow ridge crest with paths either side so that many of the plants can be viewed at eye level. Of course, the views from the ridge to the surrounding valleys and mountains would have to be magnificent. The access to the ridge would be relatively easy and a fine mountain hut would be located at one end of the ridge to provide shelter and sustenance.



Cresta de le Sele

Such a walk exists in the Dolomites along the narrow ridge southwest from Passo Selle marked as **Cresta de le Sele** on the 1:25,000 map. The ridge crest is mostly shattered rock outcrops and alternates between limestone and rocks of volcanic origin. The boundaries between the rock types are well defined and the difference between the calcifuge and calcicole plant communities is very striking. The richness of the flora appears to be enhanced by the presence of the two rock types; both the limestone and the volcanic rocks host a higher density of plants than in other areas where only one rock type is present.

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The access to the ridge is surprisingly easy. From Passo San Pellegrino, the Costabello chair lift takes you to 2273m and it is an easy 45 minute walk up to the Passo Selle at 2530m and the nearby Rifugio. The ridge extends southwest of the pass from the Refugio to Cima Alochet at 2582m, a distance of just over a kilometre. The crest is very narrow in parts but there is often a choice of paths either side of the ridge. Beyond Cima Alochet the rock is solely volcanic and the path becomes more challenging with sections of aided climbing.



Alochet

In addition to the different rock types, another reason this ridge has such an abundance of alpine flowers is that the sharp crest provides northerly and southerly aspects. For example on the more shaded north side in volcanic rock there are plants such as *Androsace alpina* (below left), *Androsace vitaliana* (below right) and *Ranunculus glacialis*.



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On the south side in the same volcanic strata are various *Arenaria* species, *Eritrichium nanum* and *Saxifraga bryoides*. Where there are limestone crevices the plant community is quite different and includes *Potentilla nitida*, *Saxifraga caesia*, *Leontopodium alpinum* and *Androsace helvetica*.



Saxifraga bryoides



Potentilla nitida



At the summit of Cima Alochet, the acidic metamorphic rock becomes very dominant. Numerous *Primula glutinosa* (above) cling to tiny cracks in the rock face on the north and west sides of the peak.

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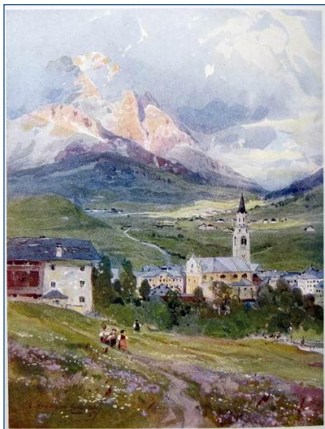
The ridge was the Austrian front line in the 1914-18 war and the crest is narrow enough that a number of tunnels were excavated right through the ridge to create defensive positions. A series of metal plaques beside the trail record some of the events. For example on June 18, 1915, an Italian regiment stormed Cima Alochet but was driven back by Austrian rifle fire.

Access to the ridge is also possible from Valle dei Monzoni (Monzonithal) on the north side but the hike is much longer compared with the route from Passo San Pellegrino. In his 1913 book, 'The Dolomites' Reginald Farrer describes a walk up the Monzonithal and he noted the sharp distinction in plants between the limestone and volcanic rock types:

"Here you have a true dolomitic mass of rosy grey, and next door a sombre peak of purple or brown; with the further, and to me more valuable result also that here you get the dolomitic flora in full splendour, and then again, next door, and no less lavish, the high Alpines of granite persuasion, flourishing not a yard beyond their calcareous friends, where the formation changes suddenly."



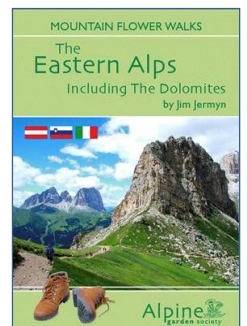
Eritrichium nanum



It is evident from his book that Farrer climbed up to the Cresta de le Sele: *"I shinned up the black shingle to the right of the pass. I found the whole arête a blue-blaze of Eritrichium."*

Left: E.Harrison Compton's painting from Farrer's book, 'The Dolomites'

Jim Jermyn's book, [Mountain Flower Walks, the Eastern Alps](#), also mentions the ridge southwest of Passo Selle as part of a walk in the Valle dei Monzoni. His suggested walk essentially follows in the footsteps of Farrer and he indicates that *Androsace wulfeniana* can be found on the ridge though we did not find the plant in July 2014.



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[Ed.: In 2012 a new book for those wishing to have a pocket companion to the flowers of the Dolomites was published by Cliff Booker and David Charlton, in association with Colletts : "[Mountain Flowers -The Dolomites](#)" [ISBN 978-0-9571628-0-8] and it has met with very good reviews.

In 2014 a new title has also been added to the AGS' Mountain Flower Walks series, this time for [The Pyrenees and the Picos de Europa](#) by the well-known SRGC stalwarts, Margaret and Henry Taylor.]

If you find yourself with a spare sunny morning in the Dolomites, a quick trip along the Cresta de le Sele is highly recommended. The path along the crest is narrow and only those who are confident in slightly exposed situations should attempt the complete route along the crest. You will be rewarded with an astonishing variety and abundance of exquisite alpine flowers decorating splendid rock crevices with astounding views beyond to the Rosengarten, Pala Group and Langkofel. After you are satiated with the flora you can sit on the balcony of the Rifugio Passo Selle and enjoy a cappuccino and the fine views to the south.

More information on this walk can be found on the author's web page:

http://www.mountainflora.ca/Flora_of_the_Alps/Cresta_de_le_Sele.html

A short video of the ridge and flora can be seen here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GI5CYnogd_I&list=UUC8JyVR5BRKru6GX8For0xg



This view of the Rosengarten is across the top of the knife edged crest with *Eritrichium nanum* and *Arenaria sp.* on the south side of the crest.

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Typical shattered rock of volcanic origin on the north side of the ridge with *Androsace alpina* and *Ranunculus glacialis*.



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A south facing natural volcanic rock garden with *Eritrichium*, *Arenaria sp.* (above left), *Saxifraga paniculata*, *Cerastium latifolium* (above right), *Saxifraga moschata* and many others.

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Saxifraga moschata

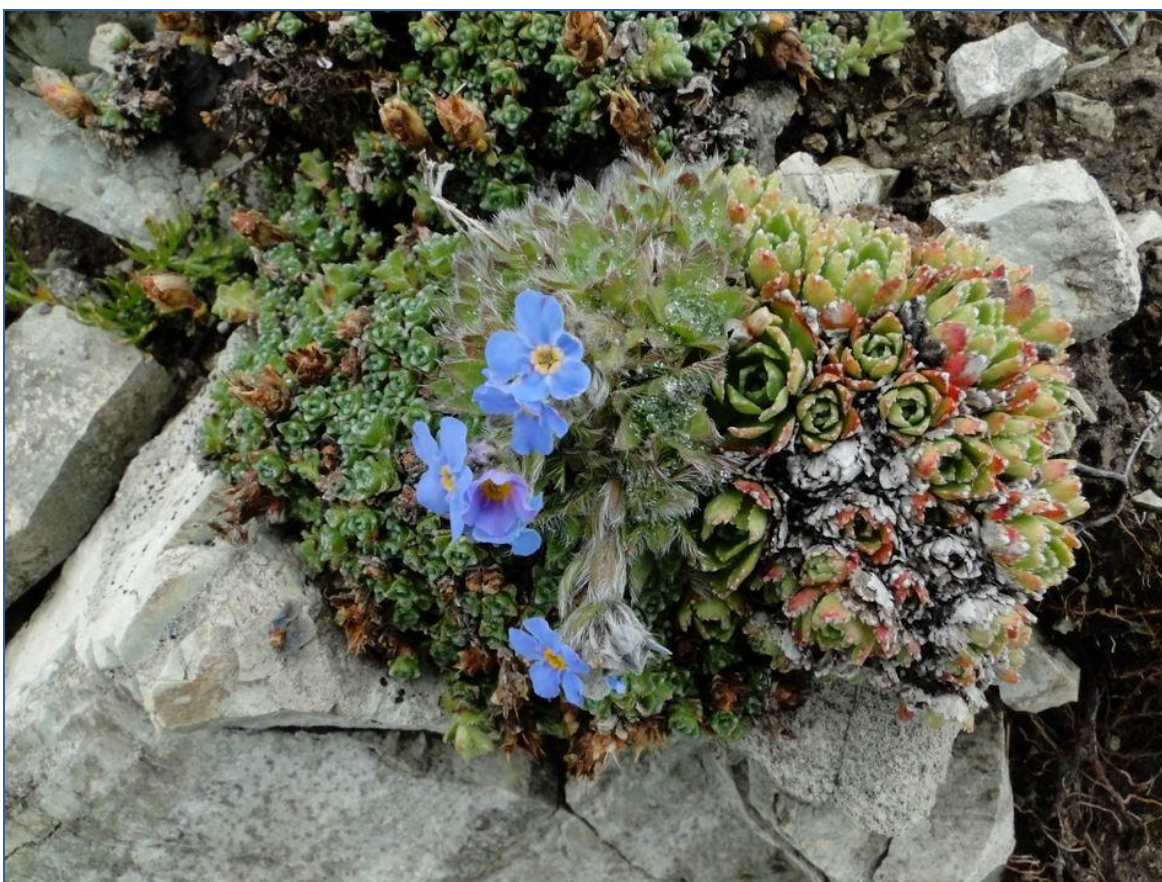


Left: *Saxifraga paniculata* and above: *S. caesia* – two of the many saxifrages in the area.

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Aster alpinus in a little plant community.



A "single bun" made up with *Saxifraga oppositifolia* on the left, *Eritrichium nanum* in the centre and *Saxifraga paniculata* on the right. It demonstrates the attractiveness of the location for alpinists with the plants so abundant they are competing for the best niches.

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There is a marked delineation between the rock types on the ridge with light grey limestone contrasting with brown metamorphic acidic rock. There is an immediate change in the plant communities at the boundaries. In this picture there is limestone in the foreground, then an intrusion of brown volcanic rock followed by limestone. At the top of the peak of Alochet in the near distance the rock changes again to blackish volcanic rock.

This natural crevice garden shows layered metamorphic rock with numerous plants in the cracks. At the bottom, *Saxifraga paniculata* can be seen coming into flower and there are a large number of *Eritrichium* and *Sempervivum*.



Below: *Ranunculus glacialis* with the Rifugio in the distance



Above: *Oxytropis campestris*

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Helianthemum nummularium : here growing on limestone on the south side of the ridge looking towards the Pala Group.



Left above: Three plants of *Androsace alpina* crowded together. The centre plant has a slightly pink hue which is a rare form in the Dolomites.

Right above: *A. alpina* looking magnificent, on the shaded north side of the ridge. These plants remain in prime condition for at least a couple of weeks. I sense that this year was a heavy snow year in the Dolomites and that it has been a cool spring and cool early summer. In other years, mid-July may be a bit late to see all the plants in flower.

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On the route back to the chairlift, I was delighted to find *Saxifraga crustata* among limestone boulders. It is not that common in the Dolomites.



Some of the other plants to be found are: *Potentilla nitida*, *Androsace helvetica*, *Linaria alpina*, *Silene acaulis*, *Thlaspi alpinum*, *Thlaspi rotundifolium*, *Anemone baldensis*, *Veronica sp*, *Arabis sp*, *Armeria alpina*, *Phyteuma sieberi*, *Erinus alpinus*, *Leontopodium alpinum*, *Acinos alpinus*, *Ranunculus seguieri*, *Dryas octopetala*, *Doronicum clusii* and *Achillea clavennae*.

This area has, in profusion, pretty much every alpine plant to be found in the Dolomites and it is well worth hiking the crest over several days to see as many plants as possible. This was our fourth trip to the Dolomites and we have never before found such an impressive natural alpine rock garden. The ridge walking is not as intimidating as it looks in the photos. Most of it is quite easy with only a couple of places where extra care is needed.

D. S.



Far left:
***Pedicularis
verticillata***

Left: on the
ridge

David Sellars
lives with his
keen gardener
wife, Wendy, in

Surrey, British Columbia, Canada. Their garden is located about 10km from the Strait of Georgia (Pacific Ocean) and about 10 km north of the US/Canada border. The USDA zone is Zone 8 and the Minimum temperature is - 17C. An SRGC member, he is a regular contributor to the forum on a [variety of subjects](#) and is also a member of [AGCBC](#) (Alpine Garden Club of British Columbia) and [NARGS](#) (North American Rock Garden Society).

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---Mountains in the Garden---

Some *Androsaces* in my Garden text and photos [Franz Hadacek](#)

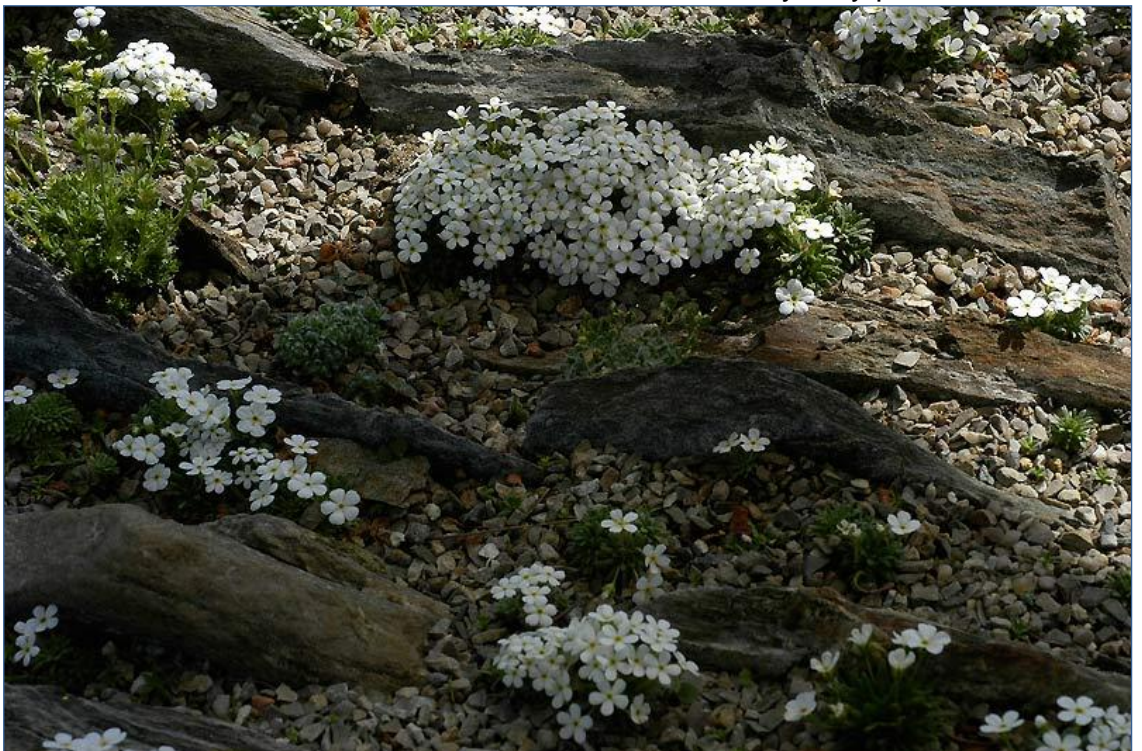


My garden is situated on a small hill in the south of Vienna, the capital of Austria. The city is geographically situated in the centre of Europe on the western end of the Hungarian Plain. We have a continental climate with hot summers and cold winters, often without snow (USDA hardiness zone 6). The generally unfavourable climate for alpine plants has required special adaptations to be made in my garden to grow plants from various habitats. I have no alpine house, because the majority of the alpine plants I grow would not survive our hot summers within such a structure.

Frames and troughs have proved to be the method of choice to grow alpine plants. Plastic roofs protect from occasional thunderstorms and hail in summer and ice in winter. Additionally they provide additional control for moisture.

My growing mix consists of 25% compost, 25% garden soil, 50% sand. I want to show some of the range of *Androsace* that I grow.

Androsace cylindrica x hirtella grows well in my troughs but it is not long lived. However it will produce self-sown seedlings each year.



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Androsace carnea* subsp. *brigantiaca – This variable subspecies is found in the south-west Alps. It is an easy plant for the scree bed, where it will spread by self-sown seedlings.



Androsace chaixii – An annual, endemic species of the French western Alps, I like this plant. It grows on stony, grassy places and in open woodland.



Androsace himalaica is a very attractive species from Kashmir, Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is easily grown and hardy outside.

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Androsace jacquemontii - this very lovely species from the western Himalaya of India grows quite well in a stone trough in my garden.



Androsace mucronifolia - a beautiful species from north-western Pakistan, Kashmir and western Tibet. It is closely related to *A. sempervoides* but it is quite different in appearance. I grow it outdoors in a trough.

Androsace sarmentosa – This is a very variable species, but easy growing in any situation and attractive in all forms. I cultivate this species in my rock garden. Hardy and flowering in spring/early summer.



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Androsace sarmentosa* forma *alba – This white form is very beautiful and it is found between rose-lilac flowers.

***Androsace sarmentosa* light-coloured** – This showy species is a native to the Himalaya and West China. I cultivate this species in my rock garden.



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Right: ***Androsace sempervoides*** - this Himalayan species is very attractive when the right conditions have been found. I cultivate it in a sunny stone trough.



Below left: ***Androsace villosa*** - In a sunny, gritty scree or trough this is an easy to grow species from the Alps, Apennines, and Carpathians. I cultivate this species in a trough. It likes sun and dryness.



Above right: ***Androsace villosa* var. *arachnoidea*** - This easy to grow variety is an excellent form, found in normal populations, mainly in the Italian Apennines.



Androsace wulfeniana – This rare species from the Eastern Alps is a delightful sight in flower in the wild but, as so often happens, it flowers but sparsely in gardens. Again, I cultivate this species in a trough.

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Androsace heeri – This is a rare hybrid between *A. alpina* x *A. helvetica* from South Tyrol.



Androsace x marpensis – (*A. globifera* x *A. robusta* subsp. *purpurea*).

This natural hybrid was collected 1988 in the mountains of Central Nepal. A plant of exceptional beauty for a stone trough.

F.H.

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---Plantspeople---

Rafa Díez Domínguez is a plantsman and artist who lives in the Segovia province of Spain. His interest as a gardener is to be allowed to promote the most important flora for conservation purposes. He is especially interested in bulbs (with a special interest in Narcissus) and perennial herbs and here we showcase some photos of plants from the vicinity of his home village, taken in mid-September and shared some time ago in the SRGC Forum.



Rafa and his wife Delphine in Sierra de Malagón, Ávila, Spain.

Rafa generously shows his photos not only in the SRGC forum but also with [TrekNature](#), the [MGS](#) and [PBS](#). One of a group of accomplished painters in the SRGC forum, Rafa paints oil landscapes and stunning [watercolours of plants](#) and of [birds and animals](#), often by commission.

Right: *Narcissus x montielanus*
Far right: *Falco peregrinus*



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---World of Bulbs---

Just two of the bulbous wildflowers seen in mid-September, within a ten minute walk of Rafa's village, where the flora is quite rich; photographs by Rafa Díez Domínguez.



Scilla autumnalis



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Colchicum montanum (syn. *Merendera montana*)

