



The Scottish Rock Garden Club

SHOW REPORTS

Highland Show in Nairn

2012



**Forrest Medal - Astragalus utahensis
shown by Sam Sutherland**



Members of the Highland Group of the SRGC have held their own group show, first in Inverness then more recently in Nairn, for over 40 years. This year for the first time they have opened their show up to all exhibitors and so in 2012 The Highland group held their first National SRGC show. This meant that they were able to award a Forrest Medal to the Best Plant in the Show and that class points would count towards National totals. Several exhibitors from the south travelled to Nairn for the show. In travelling perception of distance

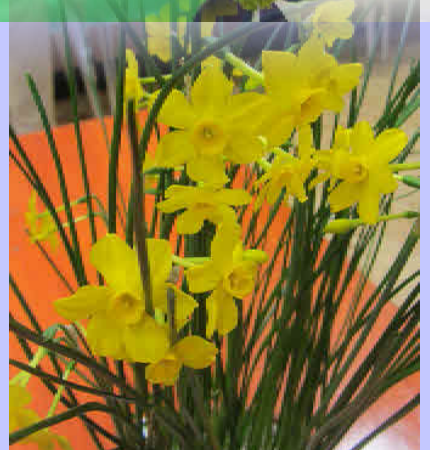




is everything! The same distance seems to look longer if viewed from South to North than it does from North to South! The show was excellent and well worth the drive and hopefully more southern members will make the trip next year..

For me, it was a return to home ground. I went to my first SRGC meetings in Inverness where my spirit was stirred by Jim Sutherland [above] who was convener in 1969. He encouraged all members to bring plants to the show, which was held in the local agricultural college and so I too became an exhibitor. At first not very successful but enthusiastic none the less! This is where I met Jack Drake, David Livingston, James Aitken -both of them- and other leading members of the SRGC. The great attraction in those days was the fabulous plant stall accompanying the show.

Although my contribution to this years shows has been small, I did at least contribute and I feel better for making the effort. In recent years I have not been so active at shows, mainly because the car was full of display materials and SRGC jumpers and sweat shirts [which can be seen on the models at left]. More stuff - fewer plants. Back to the present. The show was held in the new, bright and airy Community Centre. Parking was easy and plentiful beside the hall and there was plenty room in the hall. I spent the night before the show in the patriotically named Windsor Hotel which I can thoroughly recommend. Since Nairn is a holiday and golfing resort there are many hotels to choose from.





Sam Sutherland had a great day at Nairn! As well as the Forrest Medal winning Astragalus on page 1 he won Classes 1 and 2. - small 6 pan [below] and 3 pans different genera. [above] The Cassiope 'Randle Cooke, and Androsace villosa. The Cassiope is a dependable show plant named for the Northumbrian horticulturist from Corbridge, whose plants form the nucleus of Newcastle University's Moorbank Garden. Since little is known about Randle Cooke I have copied an article about him and the founding of Moorbank Garden from the web site of the Hexham Courier. For those who like to know about the people behind the plants this is an excellent article.



Several other good Cassiopes were on the benches, two of which Beatrice Lilley and the C. wardii hybrid from Askival, C. Snow Wreath deserve a mention. It is interesting to note the different hab-



Arum alpinum

its of the two plants, one prostrate and the other upright. Continuing on from the mention of Randle Cook, I was delighted to see a plant named for him; the Meconopsis hybrid which occurs when *M. punicea* is crossed with *M. quintuplinerva*, *Meconopsis x cooki*.

The plant is understood to be monocarpic but Ian Christie has found a perennial form which he has named 'Old Rose'. It is a great discovery and deserves to be widely grown. 'Old Rose' was awarded a Certificate of Merit





Haberlea rhodopensis
virginalis



When you travel to different parts of the country you have the chance to see different plants. At Nairn Haberlea rhodopensis virginalis caught my attention because I am much more used to seeing the blue form than this pristine white version. Rhodopensis is related to Ramonda, Haberlea may be easier to grow in Scottish gardens. It has tough leaves which tend to roll over at the edges and has several flowers per stem.. It is a good plant in both blue and white forms

and white forms



Raffenaldia primuloides



Gwen & Johnnie Black, enjoying the show. Gwen once gave a lecture at the SRGC using Johnny to exemplify all the things she found to be great about the SRGC. One particularly vivid memory is of a slide of Johnnie's legs in tartan stockings to illustrate Scottishness!



PRIMULAS

Several splendid and rare Primulas were shown by Stella and David Rankin of Kevock Nursery. They can be depended on to increase our awareness of the genus Primula as they not only grow a very wide range of Primula species but have travelled widely in Sino-himalayan regions looking at them. They have travelled in much of the country botanised by George Forrest. Above are left to right *P. elatior* meyeri, *P. limbata* & *P. cf neurocalyx*. In the

'grown from seed' class they had 3 tiny Chinese Primulas; - *P. jaffreyana* and *P. stenocalyx*. [below left & right] & *P. nanobella* [bottom left] with a close up of *P. limbata* in the centre



Primula jaffreyana

This is said to grow on dry sandy banks, but as it comes from a high-rainfall region, the banks are not so dry. The plants therefore need soil that is moisture-retaining (with plenty of humus) and freely draining (with grit).

This one has been grown under polythene cover in winter, and with shade netting in summer.



Primula stenocalyx

A plant from damp places in NW China, this has been grown in a loam / grit / organic compost with slow-release fertiliser, and kept under cover in winter with shade in summer.



Primula nanobella

This grows at high altitude in the alpine zone, in regions of high rainfall, where it can form mats, although this one has some distance to go. It needs a compost with both moisture-retaining humus and grit for drainage.

It is distinguished from Primula bella by the dark ring around the throat.





PRIMULAS

P. yuparensis alba in great condition sparked on the bench along side a rare plant which I initially took to be a squinny *P. denticulata*. Shame on me! It was a fine pan of the much more delicate *P. cashmiriana*. At this time of year the two species look very similar although *P. cashmiriana* has smoother leaves with no 'teeth' on the margins and as you can see in the picture much more yellow farina on the leaves. During resting and when the leaves begin to unfurl in spring this yellow farina is very noticeable. When grown together *denticulata* and *cashmiriana* do not seem to hybridise. This fine plant deserves to be more widely grown. Send seed to the exchanges please!



Stella & David's UN-NAMED NEW PRIMULA from VIETNAM



Primula sp. nov. KR 8915

Three primulas were collected in a very small area by a group led by Keith Rushforth in northern Vietnam. One (*P. nghialoensis*) turned out to be a new species, the second (*P. chapaensis*) had only been reported about 100 years previously, and this is third - which seems to be a new species, in the *obconicolisteri* section.

It is grown in a compost with grit and humus, and kept under cover, because it grows and flowers more or less

NATIVE TO SCOTLAND

We often ignore our native flora at our shows. Is this because 'familiarity breeds contempt' or are we overwhelmed by the wealth of plants from overseas? Whatever the reason we should all cultivate some 'natives'. I don't mean that you go out and illegally dig them up but look out for Scottish plants on sale or for seed. Most nurseries offer some especially dwarf *Salix reticulata*, which is a widespread circum-polar plant available in male and female versions. *Primula veris*, the Cowslip, may not be 'rare' but it is colourful and I suspect is being sown along many roadsides by several councils from Orkney to Devon. Great swathes of it can be found near the seaside in West Lothian. *Potentilla verna* is much more spectacular than some of its imported cousins. This one had bigger flowers than the wild ones I remember from the Lomond Hills where I wandered when I was a child. Its common name 'cinquefoil' refers to the five leaflets on each leaf, just like wee strawberry plants.

The common primrose can never be surpassed for its simple beauty. Some forms are better than other but all are attractive. We were overwhelmed by the banks of low growing [because of the fierce winds] primroses in Orkney. I tend to think of it as a woodland plant but it was spectacular beside the sea.

Then there are double primroses. They combine the simplicity of design with multi-layered double flowers in many colours. Once you start down the road of growing these your horizons are unlimited. You will be growing hose in hose Primulas and Auriculas and



double Auriculas before you can say 'Boo'!...

And why not?

Centre left is that ultimate in primroses, Lorna Milne's double auricula in a pretty smoky pastel pink shade

Section 2 was very well supported perhaps because most local members do not travel to the other SRGC shows. Again, why should they? I feel it is important to have a thriving Section 2 to encourage new exhibitors. Perhaps the perfect plants at our shows sometimes make people think 'I could never compete with that', and so they do not take up the challenge. We need to find a way to allow exhibitors to spend much longer in section 2 if they want. Perhaps allow them to win 100 first prizes before they have to be confined to Section 1?

Olive Bryers from Balloch near Inverness had a successful day winning the George Roslyn-Shirras Tankard for Most First Prize Points in Section 2 and the SRGC Bronze Medal for Most Points in Section 2. Well done Olive! Her fine plant of Primula 'White Lady' is on the top right. Her Cassiopia selaginoides is below.

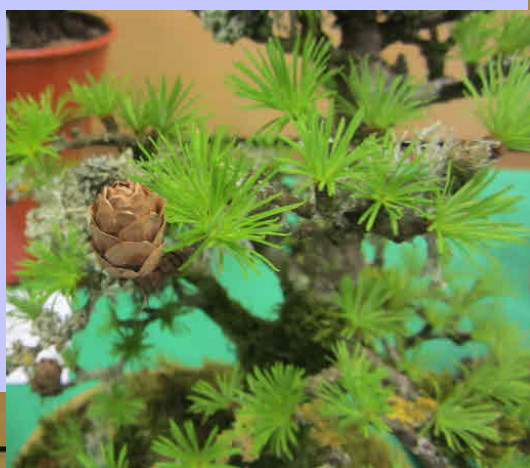


Mike Kendall from Nairn brightened the show hall with the fabulous pan of Pleione whose name I forget.



How about this wee larch complete with cones which won Best Conifer in Section 2 for Carol Maclean also from Nairn.

It's good to see several different dwarf conifers. Everyone should grow and show at least one





Olive Bryers with the George Roslyn-Shirras Tankard for Most First Prize Points in Section 2
Stan da Prato receives the Highland Trophy for most points in Section 1 from SRGC Honorary President Bette Ivey
John Owen with his trophy
SRGC President Liz Mills & Past Pres. Ian Christie
Tina Fraser receiving the Dunbarney Salver for Best Plant in section 2, *Morisia monantha*.
The Culloden Cup for Best Primula was won by Ian & Carole Bainbridge with *Primula rusbyi*







From the Hexham Courier, Friday 27 April 2007

The garden wonders of Randle Cooke

By MYLES HODNETT

A LIFETIME's work breaking new ground in the field of botany could have been lost forever if a Corbridge garden hadn't been rescued at the 11th hour. And the results of that work, which harked back to the golden age of the plant hunters, can be seen this weekend when Moorbank Botanic Garden – part of the University of Newcastle – opens its three acres to the public. The man in question who dedicated his life in Corbridge to horticulture was Randle Blair Cooke, who lived at Kilbryde, situated on Prospect Hill.

One of the men responsible for rescuing the remains of that work, after Cooke died in 1973, is John Richards, who up to two years ago when he retired was professor of botany at the university. Prof. Richards lectured at Newcastle from 1970 and has lived in Hexham since then. But it could have been a very different story because when Cooke died at the ripe old age of 93, his garden lay untended for nearly three years. By the time Prof. Richards got there, much damage had been done by mother nature. Piles of Cooke's duplex photographs, for example, were lying fading in the sunlight. These were rushed to the university where copies were made. A lot of the plants had died, but perhaps the most tragic loss was Cooke's 'bible' – his garden book.

Of enormous historical interest, half of the book was mouldy and unreadable and what remained was transcribed by Rosemary Bray of Stocksfield. So who was Randle Cooke and why was he so important in the horticultural world? He was born in 1880 and inherited the family's timber broking business. But having no interest in this, he sold up and retired early to pursue the real love of his life – botany. He was a shy and elusive man and as a result not many people seem to know much about him. Short and with a high-pitched voice, he must have cut a strange figure around Corbridge. But the quiet man who spent 70 years working in his garden was at the forefront of his field. Botanists from all over the world travelled to Kilbryde to meet him and one of his friends was the plant hunter Sir George Taylor. Taylor was keeper of botany at the British Museum before being appointed director of Kew Gardens in 1956. Other plant hunters who travelled to far-flung places like Bhutan in the Himalayas in search of rare species included George Forrest – the Indiana Jones of the botanical world – and Cooke grew seeds collected by Forrest and other plant hunters in his garden.

Cooke had no family and never married and Prof. Richards recounts stories of him being taken by his chauffeur to Vincent Square in London – the home of the Royal Horticultural Society.

Cooke would hop out of his car, carrying his plants, and return to Corbridge after winning most of the coveted RHS prizes.

Kilbryde attracted the attention of the RHS, which wrote about it in detail, and today there is a plant named after Cooke – Cassiope 'Randle Cooke'. Cooke also knew a botany lecturer at Newcastle University, William Clark, and it was this friendship which resulted in the bequeathment of Kilbryde to the university after his death. Kilbryde was run by the university for a few years before being sold. The money enabled the development of the garden at Moorbank to which Cooke's collection could be moved. Glasshouses were also built which today house tropical plants and succulents. On Sunday, Moorbank is being opened for the day in aid of the National Gardens Scheme, which raises money for various charities. As well as admiring Cooke's collection – he specialised in rhododendrons and Himalayan plants – you will be able to wander through two glasshouses and marvel at giant cicads from Africa and the West Indies. In the tropical collection you will also find banana, coffee and tea plants, as well as sugar cane and the drooping red flowers of *Acalypha hispida*. All that's missing from this Jurassic scene is a wandering allosaurus or two. But if you want to come face to face with something carnivorous take a close look at the pitcher plants which dissolve their prey before digesting them. Don't let the children too close because some pitcher plants can trap and digest small rodents.

The second glasshouse contains succulents and cacti collected from deserts all over the world.

And outside there's also a hay meadow, pond, bog garden and a herb garden, to name but a few of the attractions.

Moorbank Botanic Garden is open in support of the NGS this Sunday, April 29, and Sunday, October 28, plus an evening opening on Wednesday, July 4. Admission is £2.50 and children get in free.

You will find it on the west end of Claremont Road in Newcastle. Look for the blue gate just east of the cat and dog shelter.