



SRGC -----

Bulb Log Diary

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BULB LOG 26.....27th June 2018

Uist and Benbecula special





Approaching Lochmaddy on North Uist

This Bulb Log takes the form a photo essay giving a brief flavour of the wonderful experience that 41 SRGC Members and 16 Islanders had on our trip to the Uists and Benbecula. These David Boyd events are aimed at outreach, sharing our pleasure and experience of rock gardening with remote communities and you cannot get further out than the Outer Hebrides. We spent one day showing the locals how to make and plant up rock garden containers which proved a very rewarding experience for us as well as them.



The ruins of Borve Castle, first built in the 13th century, sat in the field behind the guest house that I stayed in and is part of the rich heritage of these Islands.



Typical road side verge with *Iris pseudacorus*.

The main attraction for many of us making this trip was to explore the machair which is an area of gently sloping coastal ground between the main dune systems and the heaths and bogs. The substrate consists of wind-blown calcareous sand, commonly made up of fragments of shells and other marine creatures. Machairs have been managed for at least a thousand years in a low intensity, traditional scheme of seasonal grazing and rotational cultivation,



without artificial fertilisers or herbicides. Click the link to read more about the [machair](#). This picture shows how the coastal dune filters the wind giving an element of protection to the machair – you can see from the direction of the marram grass that the wind is a regular occurrence.



Anacamptis pyramidalis* and *Dactylorhiza fuchsii

Orchids occurred across a number of the habitats including the rough areas immediately behind the dunes as well as on the cultivated machair.



Dactylorhiza incarnata* subsp. *coccinea



Dactylorhiza incarnata subsp. *coccinea*



Typical Machair with *Bellis perennis* and *Viola tricolor* subsp. *curtisii*



The machair is divided into strips each allocated to a family who in turn cultivate them on a rotational cycle so they are cultivated for a few years then left fallow for the next few years. It is during these fallow years that the wild flowers take over and it is fascinating to see how the plants that dominate these areas changes as the years progress. Viola and Daisies seem to form the first wave after “set aside”.

Here a small strip in the middle of the wild flowers has been cultivated for a crop of potatoes.



Potato crop



This is a good illustration to the soil structure which is very sandy with varying amounts of peat to which the crofters add seaweed as a natural fertiliser and soil conditioner.



Glebionis segetum



Rhinanthus minor

After a number of fallow years the growth becomes more dominated by larger plants and grasses. *Rhinanthus minor* is said to suppress the growth of grasses so if you are planning to make a bulb meadow this would be a good plant to introduce.



The plant mixes of the machair changed with location as well as how long it has lain fallow and I loved this area where the early colonising plant species such as *Viola tricolor* subsp. *curtisii* were dominant.



Viola tricolor* subsp. *curtisii



Daucus carota



Hieracium sp.



It is fascinating to see how the vegetation changes around this pile of straw and dung where the added nutrients support the larger plants including oats and barley; remnants of the crops that are grown as part of the rotation.



Oats, barley and Papaver rhoeas



The dark line of grasses is the boundary between strips; each of which is managed by a different crofter.



This strip was dominated by kidney vetch, ***Anthyllis vulneraria***.



Moving up the strip the plants change from the smaller daisies and viola to *Leucanthemum vulgare* and *Ranunculus*.



***Leucanthemum vulgare* and *Ranunculus* species.**



The foreground is uncultivated and leads down to the dunes beyond the track you can see clearly the strips of machair that are in cultivation this year, standing out as green behind the old tractor.



Areas where stock is kept have a different flora with a big clump of nettles enjoying the enriched ground.



Dactylorhiza incarnata subsp. *coccinea*



Two more orchids are **Coeloglossum viride** (Frog Orchid) and **Dactylorhiza incarnata subsp. coccinea**.



Coeloglossum viride



Now I will show
a few plants from
the white sandy
shore and the
dunes.



Cakile maritima



Cakile maritima



***Honckenya peploides* in fruit.**



This coastal track between the dunes and the machair with *Potentilla anserina* and an attractive golden grass growing up the middle reminded me of our planted drive way.



Potentilla anserina, the silverweed is well named here it was compact growing in other places it was much more vigorous.



Potentilla anserina growing with grasses and **Galium vernum** on the landward side of the dunes.



Achillea millefolium



Howbeg and Howmore machairs with Beinn Mhor , Corodale, Hecla in the distance.



Dactylorhiza fuchsii



The excavated material from rabbit burrows is a good way to understand the substrate – here it is almost pure shell sand.



View across the dunes looking towards Barra



Another view of Beinn Mhor , Corodale and Hecla mimicked by the three rocks in the foreground .



A few hours later at Garrynamone machair the sky was a stunning blue.



A small group of us decided to hike along the strand and cross the tidal causeway to the small island of Orasay.



The view back from Orasay showing the causeway which is only submerged at high tides.



Iris pseudacorus

Although only small the island had a wonderful range of habitats and flora – I could easily have spent the whole day here.



A nice water worn section provides a beautiful illustration of the underlying layers.



Dactylorhiza fuchsii



Dactylorhiza purpurella



Platanthera chlorantha





Platyanthera chlorantha



Dactylorhiza maculata with Burnet Moth



Another of the many Burnet Moths this time on *Lychnis flos-cuculi*.



This was the only *Primula vulgaris* that we found still in flower but there were thousands of plants so a trip here in the spring would be a wonderful sight.



One of many plants growing in the short turf is *Anagallis tenella*.



A different habitat on this side of the island where there is a very rocky shore line.



Sedum anglicum grows among the moss on a lichen covered boulder – forms a perfect rock garden.



Armeria maritima



Glaux maritima growing among the pebbles.



The rocks are of **Lewisian Gneiss** - a metamorphic rock which is 3 billion years old, making it some of the oldest rock on the planet.



Another rabbit has kindly excavated the higher parts of the island showing a very peaty soil type – it is in this zone that we found masses of *Dactylorhiza maculata*.



Dactylorhiza maculata



Some of the thousands of *Dactylorhiza maculata*.



Eriskay township.



Eriskay was our final stop for botanising then a farewell dinner at Am Politician pub and restaurant. One of the best known events in the recent history of the Western Isles was the wreck of [the SS Politician](#) on the 5th February 1941 and the story was used by Compton Mackenzie for his book Whisky Galore, and later for the Ealing Studio

comedy by the same name. Relics and images can be seen at the Am Politician pub and restaurant on Eriskay and we were shown and allowed to handle two of the original bottles.



I will finish with this image looking across the water towards the island of Barra – I can recommend a visit to the Uists where you will find history, culture, geology and a host of botanical delights plus a very warm welcome.....