



BULB LOG 37.....11th September 2019



The Scottish Rock Garden Festival Inverewe

INVEREWE

THE SCOTTISH ROCK GARDEN FESTIVAL



An important gardening project is taking place at Inverewe Garden this autumn that is both historical and forward looking - in the spirit of our origins but using the most advanced design and build techniques and knowledge in the rock gardening world.

A new Rock Garden site has been chosen in discussions between the Scottish Rock Garden Club and the National Trust for Scotland team at Inverewe. And during the project, visitors will be able to see the work in progress and take part in walks and talks by Scotland's leading Rock Garden experts.

Where to find the Rock Garden



INVEREWE

THE SCOTTISH ROCK GARDEN FESTIVAL

5 - 9 SEPTEMBER 2019



nts.org.uk

The National Trust for Scotland is a Scottish charity. 5-000940

nts.org.uk

The Project

The chosen site for the Rock Garden Project is situated in front of Inverewe House, in the first area reached on the path leading to the lower terraces approximate size of 8m by 4m, with a second area further round that path around the natural rock outcrop.

Materials

Materials provided for the project include 5 tonnes of rock in different shapes and sizes, 5 tonnes of sharp sand and around 1 tonne of light top soil and a selection of wonderful rock garden plants!

SCOTTISH ROCK GARDEN CLUB EXPERTS

Ian Young

Ian Young has been interested in plants since he was a boy, he has focused much of his attention on bulbs, alpine and rock garden plants.

The garden created by Ian and his wife Margaret is full of many innovative features and within it they have moulded a range of habitats from alpine troughs to woodland to suit the equally wide array of plants they grow.

Formally a President of the Scottish Rock Garden Club Ian writes a weekly garden diary, the Bulb Log, which appears on the website www.srgc.net

As well as his writing Ian is a popular speaker and has lectured widely both within the UK and internationally.



Paul Spriggs

Paul is an avid plant explorer, photographer, mountaineer, owner of Spriggs Gardens Landscaping company, and current President of the Vancouver Island Rock and Alpine

Garden Society. He has a passion for all wild plants especially those of dwarf stature and collects and cultivates them at various gardens in his hometown of Victoria, BC, Canada. Paul has learned the craft of crevice garden building directly from one of it's innovators, Zdenek Zvolanek, of the Czech republic, and in the past decade and a half, has built many gardens in public parks and private homes that range in size from small feature troughs, to large installations involving many tonnes of stone. Paul is passionate about spreading the word of this style, through speaking to garden clubs all over the west, and by giving workshops for those keen on learning the finer points of this developing art form. He is currently working on the first North-American book about crevice gardens with Co-author Kenton Seth. He has been rock gardening for roughly 22 years and building crevice gardens for about 15 years.



Zdenek Zvolanek

Zdeněk Zvolanek (known as ZZ) is a famous Czech crevice gardener, designer and builder who has been creating crevice gardens around the world, such as those at the Botanic Gardens of Montreal in Canada, Bangsbo in Denmark and RHS Wisley in the UK, as well as more than 20 gardens in Bohemia and many private gardens elsewhere. ZZ has been gardening for 40 years at his own garden in a vertiginous former quarry in the Czech Karst. ZZ, also a musician, is a popular speaker who has travelled extensively as a speaker and visiting wild plant habitats. He is closely involved in the Czech Rock Garden Society (CZRGs), editing their journal and he is a founder member of the editorial team for the magazine for the Scottish Rock Garden Club, 'International Rock Gardener'. He wrote The Crevice Garden and its Plants, published by the Alpine Garden Society 2006, ISBN 9780900048784.



Walks and Talks

In addition to the project work there will be two talks which will be held in the Inverewe Garden Café.

Friday 6 September

14.00

Demonstration of landscaping in troughs and containers (subject to weather)

Venue: Near to the Rock Garden

19.00

Rock Gardening in Troughs and Containers - Ian Young

Venue: Inverewe Garden Café

Saturday 7 September

14.00

Demonstration of landscaping in troughs and containers (subject to weather)

Venue: Near to the Rock Garden

19.00

Crevice Gardens - Paul Spriggs

Venue: Inverewe Garden Café





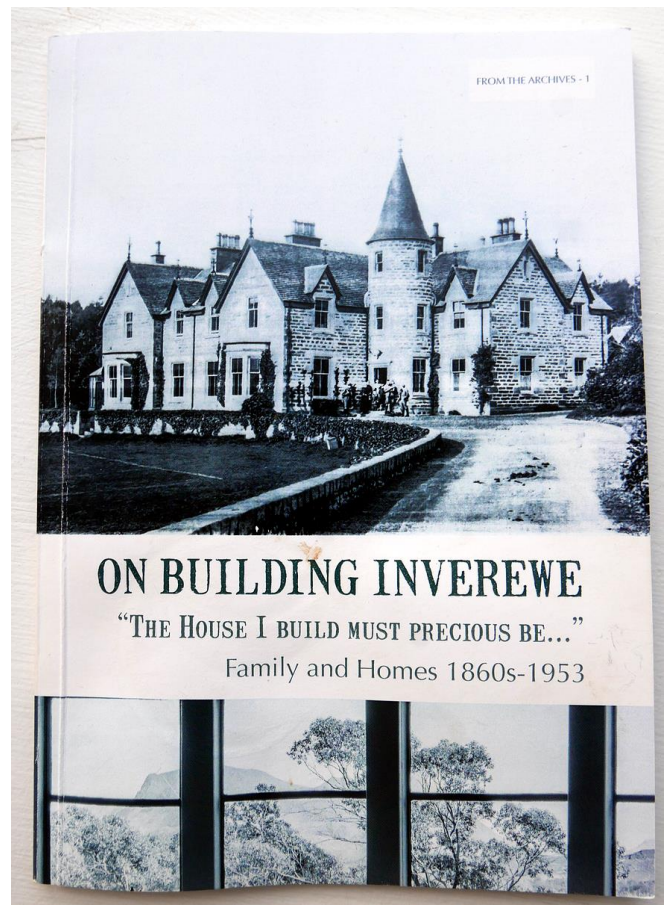
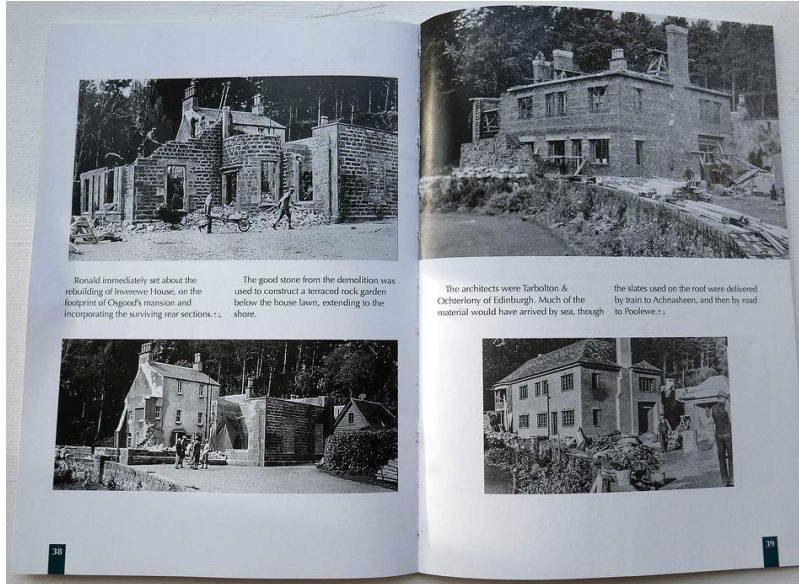
This past week I have been across at the National Trust for Scotland's Inverewe Garden where we had gathered together an international team of rock garden experts to rebuild a small part of the large terraced rock garden in a crevice style landscape. The project is a co-operation between the Scottish Rock Garden Club and the National Trust for Scotland's Inverewe Garden and the this phase was to restore part of the historic rock garden in a modern crevice style as well as staging a series of workshops and talks as part of the SRGC David Boyd scheme of reaching out and

sharing our knowledge and passion for rock gardening with the wider community.



The core team consisted of myself, Zdenek Zvolanek from Prague, Paul Spriggs from Vancouver Island and the Scottish Rock Garden Club President, Julia Corden – both ZZ and Paul have experience of building many such gardens across the world.

Inverewe Garden has a long interesting history which is well worth reading about and the NTS has published an excellent booklet on building Inverewe, ISBN 978-1-9997516-0-9, here I will concentrate on the history of the rock garden. The original house built by Osgood Mackenzie in the 1860s burnt down to a roofless ruin in 1914. The family moved into one of the gatehouses until the remains of the burnt out ruins could be demolished and a new house built in its place, only the remains of a back wing stayed intact and survive today.



Ronald immediately set about the rebuilding of Inverewe House, on the footprint of Osgood's mansion and incorporating the surviving rear sections.

The good stone from the demolition was used to construct a terraced rock garden below the house lawn, extending to the

Why this is relevant to the rock garden now becomes apparent because the original house was built of red Torriden Sandstone and it was these very blocks of stone that Maire Sawers, Osgood's daughter, used to construct the original terraced rock garden, some of which we were using in the new construction.



Much of the original rock garden terraces remain intact and it is hoped that in coming years they can be restored.



A unique feature of this rock garden is this reclining Eucalyptus tree which has become a popular tactile and visual feature with the many thousands of visitors who admire and scramble across the beautifully marked silky smooth trunk.



The core team of 5 had the honour of staying in the upper apartment of Inverewe house where we enjoyed the very same magnificent views across Loch Ewe towards the mountains of Torridon that attracted Osgood MacKenzie to build his mansion here. This accomodation was particularly handy as it overlooked the rock garden and we could see the top of the site from our bedroom windows as well as the sitting room.



View from the sitting room window.



View from the terrace across the lawn across Loch Ewe towards the village of Poolewe and the mountains.



This is the view from the bedroom window looking across the lawn with the eucalypt and the rock garden on the ground that falls down towards the shores of the loch; the top of our site can be seen on the left where the pallets and barriers are and the towering Beinn Airigh Charr in the distance.

This project has been discussed over a few years and when I was over at Inverewe Erythronium Festival in April we selected the area that we would work on and during the spring and summer months the Inverewe Garden staff cleared it of all perennial weeds such as couch grass so it was ready for us to start into the work on 5th September. The garden staff also gathered around 10 - 12 tonnes of the materials that we had asked for to the nearest location accessible by mechanical means.



When we arrived the gently sloping site below the terraced wall was cleared of all the weeds and ready for us to get started on building the new crevice garden.



Although I had sent a number of pictures of the area to Paul Spriggs, the main designer and builder, he only saw it for the first time when we arrived last Wednesday, 4th September – above Paul, ZZ and myself are surveying and discussing the plan with some of the main Inverewe garden staff.



The bed with some of the rocks viewed from lower down the slope which falls off steeply down to the shore line.



The first thing we had to do on the site was to lift the old large edging stones along the path edge as well as the other stones few large stones that remained burried in the area.





Paul Spriggs, Ian Young and Zdenek Zvolanek



Originally these large edging stones had been laid flat and our intention was to reuse them by standing them on their edge as part of the crevice work. Some were pretty heavy and moving them gave a good indication to the amount of heaving and grunting that we had let ourselves in for over the next four days of the build.



The idea behind this style of crevice gardens is that they should mimic a natural rock outcrop where the often tilted strata degrade to form natural crevices in which plants can establish - and you do not have to go far to find examples for inspiration. If we happened to stumble and fall down the slope we would land beside this outcrop which sits directly below where we are working - fortunately no one fell but I did explore the shore line.



The next decision is to decide on the angle of the crevices and it is always preferable to have the crevices sloping diagonally across a bed and not parallel or at right angles as that provides the most effective view of the rock faces and landscape we are creating. We chose an angle so those approaching along the main access path to this level would be faced with a lovely oblique view of the rock faces we were forming with the rocks. During the process of setting the first few stones Paul became introduced to the Scottish Midge, a fearsome insect that likes a bit of blood.



The next stage was to start building up the ground levels with an infill of sand, loam and grit to create height. We used at least 10 to 12 tonnes of material on this project, the sand and grit came in 20kg bags while the loam and rocks were loose and all of this material had to be moved by hand some distance often down several levels to where it was required and much of it had to be handled a number of times, all of it at least twice. As well as the famous midges we also had some experience of the West Coast rainfall which luckily mostly came at night or during our breaks but it did make the ground very muddy so we spread out some of the silver sand to make it cleaner to walk on.



The heaviest rain, and it was torrential, came on Thursday night after the first days build and we were delighted to see there had been no wash out of the material from between the crevices we had constructed.



We received permission to break through the wall continuing the crevices right up linking the main construction right up onto the upper level. While you can form a rough impression of the finished landscape there are so many variables that arise along the build that you have to be adaptable, constantly reassessing the design and now that we had permission to break through to the upper level we needed to reassess. Rather than a single summit we decided to go for two high points on the lower level reaching a

third and highest point on the upper level. Building a rock garden is an art and much like working on a drawing or painting where each mark (or rock) you lay down influences where and how the next one should be placed. Each rock has four orientations in one plain and two in the other and we did end up turning some rocks, often the heaviest, in all possible variations until we found the way we all liked best. We would take it in turns to stand back as the spotter while the others manhandled the heavy weights around heaving and rocking until we got the thumbs up that we had a good position.



The placement of the rocks is an aesthetic choice so having an artistic eye helps plus the decision becomes easier with experience – the most experienced among us ,ZZ, would often call out “higher higher”! Have you ever tried to roll an extremely heavy rock up a hill!



With the exception of rocks from the wall and the few we dug up on site all the other materials had to be brought in by hand from the nearest access point some distance and two levels up from the main working site: how much easier our work would have been if the new mini digger with its range of attachments could have had access all the way down to the site.



We are very grateful to all the young Inverewe Garden staff, both permanent and temporary, who worked so hard and enthusiastically staying on well beyond their required hours of employment delivering the material down to the work site from the storage area and then helping heave and manoeuvre some of the heaviest rocks as we moved them into the final position. I was very grateful for this help - we could not have done it without them.



Gradually the build gained height as we approached the top of the wall and the upper level. Friday, the second day of the build, the weather improved and we enjoyed the most magnificent day with blue skies and sunshine. Early on The Midge was out and biting so we rushed for the repellent, some choosing to wear midge nets, but the fearsome beasts were soon forced into retreat as the sun gained in strength.



With much of the major rock work on the lower level now in place it is time for another break. Sometimes it is good to stop and get away from the site for a break coming back refreshed to view the work with a fresh eye.



Gone for lunch! The scene outside our accommodation during a break time.



While inside.....we eat cake. Zdenek Zvolanek, Zdena Kosourova, Paul Spriggs and Julia Corden.



There were many gatherings and discussions held around our dining table during the course of our stay: some were more serious than others, such as here on our first day where Paul is explaining our outline and vision to Head Gardener Kevin Ball .



As well as working on the garden Zdena Kosourova, ZZ's partner, was an important member of the team: as the most skilled cook she kept us fed with the delicious food that she prepared from fresh vegetables picked from the Inverewe walled kitchen garden.





Later in the build two more previous SRGC presidents Ian and Carole Bainbridge arrived helping with the lighter tasks of planting top dressing, cleaning the rocks behind the construction team, as well as demonstrating how to make a fish box trough to some of the constant stream of garden visitors.

The Scottish Rock Garden Club's David Boyd Events are intended to reach out taking our enthusiasm and expertise on Rock Gardening to outlying areas as well as cooperating with other organisations such as the Inverewe Rock Garden Project. In addition to the fish box trough demonstration Paul and I both gave demonstrations on the lawn beside the rock garden showing how you can landscape and plant a container creating your own small scale crevice garden.



On Friday and Saturday evening Paul and I gave illustrated talks covering all aspects of crevices landscapes large and small from the construction of small troughs, raised beds all the way up to some of the large scale crevice gardens that Paul has constructed both by himself and alongside Kenton Seth.



Above - Ian Young landscaping a container and below - the next day Paul Spriggs demonstrates his version.





Kevin Frediani (NTS Property Manager), Ian Young, Paul Spriggs, Zdenek Zvolanek, & Head Gardener Kevin Ball.



After the talk in the evening and as a relaxation we showed that we could also rock out in another sense with an unscheduled jam session when Kevin Frediani, the Property Manager provided us with a couple of guitars and a magnificent banjo he built himself click the link to see a short [video clip](#).



On Friday we had the most magnificent weather with bright blue skies and by the end of the day the construction had moved to the top level.



As the construction team completed the lower section we handed it over to Julia Corden who was in charge of both the acquisition and the planting of the plants which, as per the brief from Inverewe, consisted mostly of New Zealand alpine plants.



As the planting team worked away on the lower section other garden workers and volunteers helped out on the top.



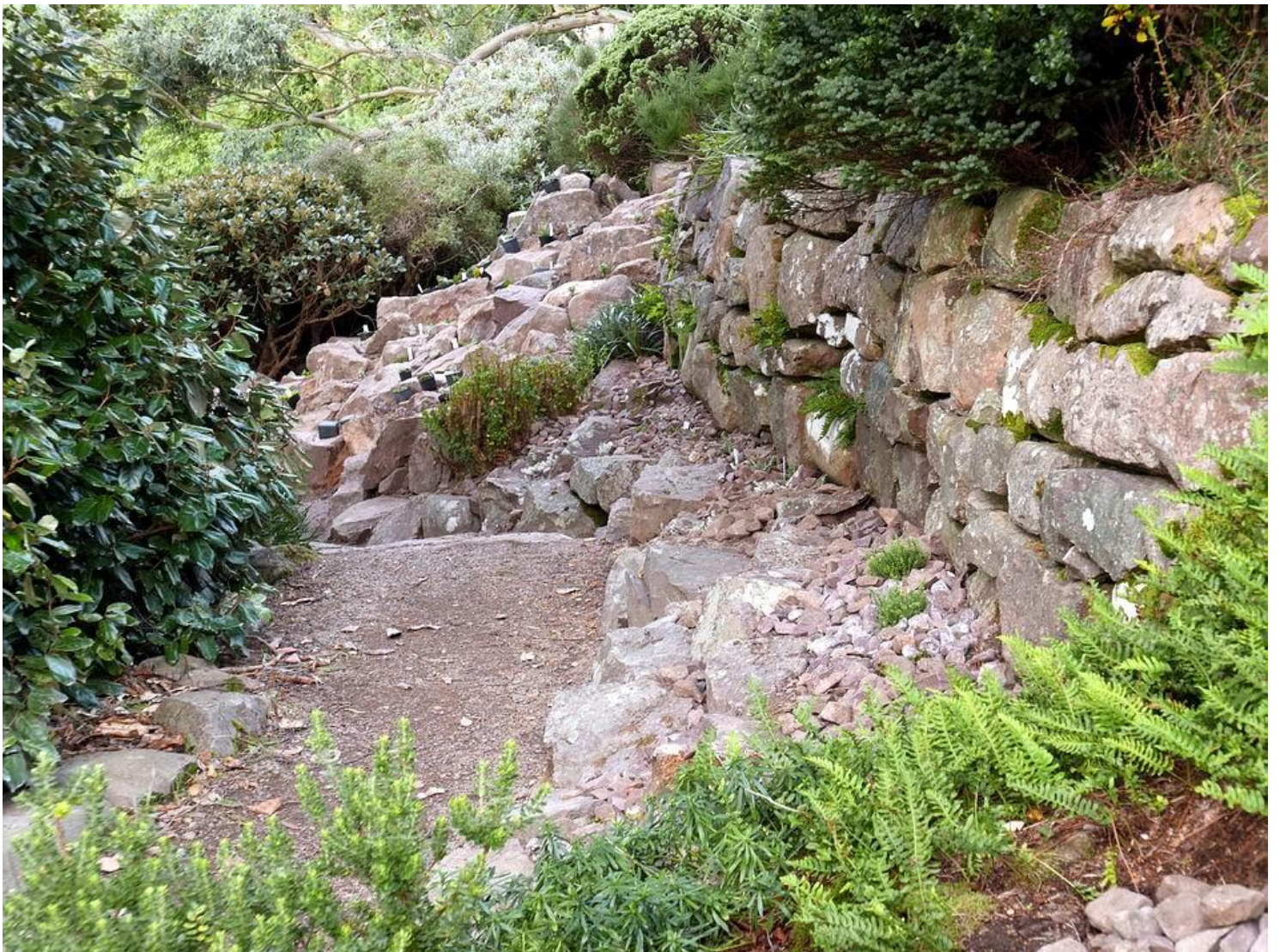


It was critical that we could break through the wall and continue the crevice work onto the top flat border where this small crevice section has become an instant eye catching feature which draws visitors towards it and as they approach the larger connected area of the crevice work will be revealed.





We also tidied and planted up the narrow border between the wall and the path, cutting back a Berberis shrub to allow a view of the crevice bed to be slowly revealed as you approach.





With all the construction work completed the last of the plants were laid out ready to be planted.





I was up early on the Sunday morning while the others enjoyed a well-earned extra hour in bed so I took the advantage to spend a couple of hours exploring the sea shore and garden. The picture above and the next two below were taken starting from the low water line looking towards the natural rock formation and up towards our constructed crevice which can be seen between the pine and the birches.





The natural rock outcrop with our rock work sits perfectly just above the very natural rock structure it is imitating.



It is a pity that most will walk past and never be aware of what lies below - how wonderful it would be if one day all these features natural and manmade could all be incorporated into a visitor experience as it perfectly explains what this style of gardening is all about.

All planting is now completed and our work here is over, for now.



The rain will wash off the rocks, settle in the medium of sand/grit and loam we used to build up the landscape and water the plants, most of which we hope will grow well– time will tell.



Some of the team that had a part to play in the project.



The final task for Paul was to wash off his well-worn boots, as we all did, in a disinfectant bath as part of the bio-security.

I was excited about this project but it succeeded way beyond my expectations in the way it brought together an international team of gardeners from the SRGC and the NTS where we could pass on our passion and experience to a younger generation of gardeners.

I want to thank Kevin Frediani and Kevin Ball for trusting us and letting us loose on their precious 100 year old rock garden

to create something that will hopefully last for the next hundred years.



Despite all the hard work I was flying high.

I am grateful to the NTS for permission to use the historical pictures of Inverewe, also to Julia Corden and Zdena Kosourova for some of their pictures mostly those, like above, where I am in front of the camera.



There is much more that I can say about this project in time that will appear here and/or in some other place but for now I will leave you with one of the casualties of the good time that we all enjoyed at Inverewe - Sláinte.....