

# The Scottish Rock Garden Club

## Forrest Medal - Highland in Nairn 2016

### Benthamiella patagonica—white

### Shown by Francis & Margie Higgins



Francis and Margie had a good day at last week's show in Perth. Could they top it? Well YES! Emphatically. I don't know how many first prizes they won at their home show. Winning the Forrest for the second year in succession is something few exhibitors experience. Why did they win this week and not last week? Their star plant was at home last week getting ready for its triumph this week. Their *Benthamiella patagonica* was the biggest plant of the species I have seen and it was very well flowered. The centre flowers were towering over the cushion just to find room to open. It is not very often that a South American let alone a Patagonian native plant wins the Forrest. If asked I would say it was Colonel and Mrs Anderson's plant of *Oreopolus glacialis*, at a Glasgow show 30 years ago. In my ignorance I did not really appreciate their achievement. Now I know better and can state that Francis and Margie have won with a superbly well grown plant. **Many Congratulations to both of them.**

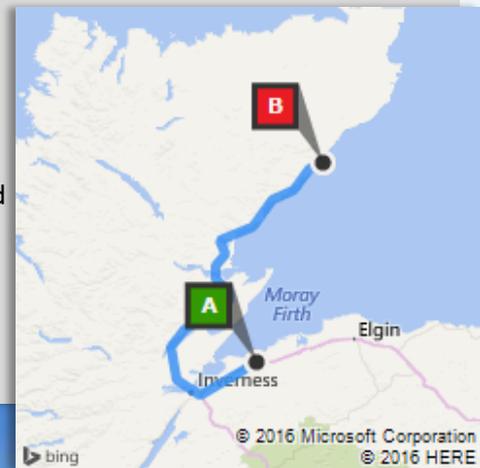


It was great that the *Benthamiella* won in Nairn in the same year that Dutch grower, Ger van der Beuken was the SRGC travelling speaker. Ger talked about Patagonia and its plants and if not the original introducer of the *Benthamiella* to the UK certainly brought plants for sale at our shows. Added to that Highland Show Secretary David organised his tour and we have a happy story with all the heroes with a part to play in this Nairn show.





I wrote that Nairn show was the 'home show' for Francis and Margi but it takes 1 hour 45 minutes to drive the 92 miles from their home in Berriedale to Nairn. If you stand on the sea shore at either place you can see the other on the horizon. They could have travelled by boat.





Benthamiella is native to Patagonia. It is a member of the deadly nightshade family, Solanaceae, whose members are as diverse as Potato and Tomato. Although not easy to see because they are small the flowers are similar to potato flower, being 5 lobes but in Benthamiella the petals are reflexed and rolled back, so the flower looks like a tube. It is found in the cold windswept border area of Argentina and Chile, its low mats hugging the ground. As well as this white form, yellow flowered plants are also in cultivation. We learnt a lot about Pata-

gonian plants from Ger van der Beuken [pictured above] who has travelled widely in South America. Ger has photographed many South American plants and grows some of them in his nursery in Holland. He has led several trips to Patagonia but says his 2017 trip will be his last!

The name commemorates George Bentham, "the premier systematic botanist of the nineteenth century". He was born near in Stoke near Plymouth in 1800. He befriended the Joseph Dalton Hooker [son of William Jackson Hooker, patron of David Douglas]. Joseph Hooker was Charles Darwin's best friend. He worked at Kew from from 1855 till the end of his life. Thus Bentham's career spanned the period when Darwin proposed his theory of evolution. It took a long time but by 1874 Bentham accepted Darwin's theory. Having accepted the possibility of evolutionary change, he wrote 'We cannot form an idea of a species from a single individual, nor of a genus from a single one of its species. We can no more set up a typical species than a typical individual.' His words may seem like a truism to us but they express the need to see several examples of a species before defining it.

In 1857 the British government began to prepare floras in English of the indigenous plants of the British Colonies and Possesions. Flora hongkongensis [1861] was the first English language flora on any part of the vast Chinese flora. Flora Australensis followed in 7 volumes from 1863 till 1878. His most famous work was his Handbook of British Flora begun in 1853 and first published in 1858. Many editions were published and it was the book used by students for over 100 years. After Bentham's death it was edited by Hooker, and was known simply as *Bentham & Hooker*. George Bentham's greatest work was *Genera Plantarum*, another collaboration with Joseph Hooker. It was begun in 1862 and concluded in 1883. As we all know, Linnaeus first proposed the binomial system for naming species. Bentham and Hooker took this much further and established their excellent classification of plants. This is known as the 'Bentham and Hooker system' and is still the basis of modern plant classification of Orders, Families, Genera, species etc.

I think it is fascinating that our interest in growing rock garden plants links us with the greatest scientists and explorers of the past. Thank you Francis for opening the door to George Bentham's life.

