

# The Scottish Rock Garden Club

## Highland Show in Nairn

### 25th April 2015

*Over the mountains over the sea. Johnnie broke a windae and blamed it on me.*

*He telt ma maw, ma maw telt ma pa. I got a leatherin' hee-hee haw!*

These lyrics from an old skipping rhyme came back to me as I once again drove north on the A9. I was driving through the mountains and up to the sea, to the pearl of the Moray Firth, Nairn. I have know this route and its mountains for 45 years, yet each time I am stunned by the beauty of the scenery through which it passes. Early on this Saturday morning, with average speed cameras acting to keep vehicles apart [ because if every one travels at the same speed, it is well nigh impossible to catch up with other drivers or they with you], I seemed to have the road to myself. At first heavy rain and



sleet occluded the Ochil Hills but by the time I reached Perth the sun appeared for a short time. The odd hail shower continued to batter down just to add some excitement. By Drumochter blue sky was peeking through but deep snow clung to the mountain tops on either side of the bleak forbidding pass. Lines of electric pylons clung to the eastern slopes. These carry power from Beaulieu to Denny, right past my home town of Dunblane. The pylons follow the road for part of the route and here in Drumochter pass they tower over everything else. The good thing about the new pylons is that since they are taller, there are fewer of them but they certainly jar with mother nature's creation. The snow on the Cairngorm massif sparkled in the morning light and once past Aviemore the scenery was spellbindingly wonderful. I kept stopping to look and admire. Soon I was on Dava Moor and could look backwards to the Cairngorms and forward to the Moray Firth. Little lochs sparkled among the brown winter colours of the moorland. Once over the river Findhorn the route passes by green fields edged with golden gorse. Before you realise the sign welcomes you to Nairn where a welcome cup of coffee is waiting for you. It is well worth the early rise. Equally easy to travel the day before and spend the night in a hotel. Those of us from the south may have had a journey but so did some of the 'local' members. Sparse population density means that folk may have to travel a long way for SRGC meetings and shows in this neck of the woods. Convenor John lives 50 miles away in Fort Augustus while Forrest medal winners Francis and Margaret Higgins are 90 miles from home, although on a clear day you could look north over the sea and probably see their house on the far Caithness coast. Many exhibitors made the trip north to support the show but many of the top plants, as well as THE top plant were shown by northern members.





*Plants in Section 2 were of a very high standard*





**A selection of excellent prize winning plants shown by Highland Group members [ clockwise from top left]. *Fritillaria meleagris* [best plant from a first time exhibitor, Hamish Macintosh], *Trillium luteum* [Certificate of Merit for John Owen], *Auricula* 'Black Jack', *Primula elatior*, Gold Lace polyanthus, *Celmisia coriacea*, [best plant in Section 2 from Olive Bryers]**



*Primula vulgaris* hybrid, *Primula rosea*,  
*Erigeron* 'Canary Bird', *Calceolaria* 'Walter  
Shrimpton'



# South Africa in Nairn



*Sanicella verna* is a member of the Hypoxidaceae, like *Rhodohypoxis*. This wee plant comes from the Sani Pass and it takes its name from the Pass in The Drakensburg Mountains growing at heights of up to 2,700m [twice the height of Ben Nevis], growing in short turf. It is grown in very gritty compost and kept very moist. The white flowers have a yellow centre. Not showy but definitely attractive.



Still in the south of Africa these two interesting exhibits provoked much comment. Were they rock plants? Are they hardy? The answer to the first is, 'If you lived in South Africa you would grow these in a rock garden. The growers say they are hardy. I suspect they are hardy in the same way many of our show plants are hardy in that they stand cold but don't like winter wet. The Karoo Botanic garden in South Africa grows many South African succulents in a rock garden style.

Lithops are known as living stones because that is what they look like. I wish they had been discovered by David Livingstone!

*Titanopsis* is also named for stones, this time 'Limestone'. The 'opsis' means 'looking like'.



Both are members of the Aizoaceae. Their flowers are shiny, daisy-like. They are cousins to the ice plants, *Mesembryanthemum*.



*Asperula arcadiensis* is the proper name for the plant which for many years was known as *A. suberosa*. It used to be shown more frequently and it is was good to see it back on the benches. It is a very brittle plant from rocky areas in the Peleponnese. Care must be taken to prevent mildew in damp weather and when the 'millions' of wee flowers fall onto the feathery foliage.

*Rupicapnos africana* is another brittle plant. It hails from North Africa in tufa and limestone cliffs. In cultivation it can seed around and is happy growing in a sand plunge. It is difficult to persuade it to transplant into a pot or pan. Its flowers resemble those of a *Corydalis* and it too is in the *Papaveraceae*. In the morning when the show hall was cold, as it had been overnight, the flowers had 'collapsed' or settled down onto the foliage. As the temperature rose so did the flower stems.



Stan da Prato showed his two superb *Andromeda polifolia* plants. The plant on the right *A. p. Nikko*, was judged Best Ericaceous plant in the show, having won the Forrest Medal at Perth last week. The other is *A. polifolia* 'Blue ice'. Folk remarked that it would have been the best ericaceous plant had Stan left the other at home. Both are excellent show and garden plants because they stay in good condition for several weeks





*Jim Sutherland introduced me to the Scottish Rock Garden Club and inspired me to grow rock garden plants. I owe him a great big debt of gratitude.*



*Best pan of Bulbs was John Owen's Fritillaria acmopetala, winning for him his own Askival Trophy.*

*Carol & David Shaw showed a different form of acmopetala, a 'Paul Furse Form'*





***Olive Bryers won Best Primula with P. ellisiae, a wee stunner from the USA***



***Everyone loved this dark flowered Bellevalia paradoxa grown by Coline Souter***



*Saxifraga 'Pixie'*  
*Arum elongatum*  
*Primula 'Linda Pope'*  
*Primula amoena*  
*P. pubescens 'Rumbling Bridge'*  
*Ranunculus amplexicaullis*

THE SCOTTISH ROCK GARDEN CLUB  
HIGHLAND SHOW 2015  
GRAEME BUTLER  
RUMBLING BRIDGE  
FIRST PRIZE



*Tina Finch's arrangement of cut flowers was magical and bigger than this tiny Pinus mugo 'Mops'*





*Continued next week in Glasgow!*