

The Scottish Rock Garden Club Highland Show, Nairn

Date 29th April 2017



The journey to Nairn from my home in Dunblane means a trip along the A9, a route which is never boring as it passes through varied countryside. Set cruise control and enjoy the journey! First, north east, through agricultural country up Strathallan to Auchterarder and down Strathearn to Perth with the rolling Ochils are on your righthand side. Nearer to Perth the highland hills and mountains on the left line the



northern horizon. At Perth the route is almost due north towards Pitlochry, Aviemore and Inverness. Average-speed cameras remind you to be a good citizen at almost every road junction. I have come to like these cameras as long as other drivers maintain a decent speed. Had I travelled on the Friday instead of rushing up early on the morning of the show I would have stopped to visit The Explorers' Garden in Pitlochry, where Julia Corden has and is still transforming a wooded hillside beside the theatre into a horticultural paradise dedicated to plants introduced or discovered by Scottish Plant Hunters. If you do visit, take in a play at the theatre while you are in Pitlochry.

Some years at Nairn show time there is snow in Drumochter Pass and on the Cairngorm heights but this year the mountains were almost snowless. North of Carrbridge there were large patches where the heather had been burnt, which revealed red and ochre coloured clumps of sphagnum moss, giving the landscape a strange appearance. One of the joys this year especially just north of Dunkeld and on the final part of the journey over Dava Moor as the road trundles down towards the Moray Firth was bright golden yellow gorse. Few plants other than broom can dominate the landscape. One lesson I learned was that if you are going to use a Sat-Nav, make sure you enter the correct Post Code. I entered show secretary's Post Code instead of that of the show venue and even tho' I knew the correct route perfectly well, I blithely followed instructions, thinking it might just be a short cut. No chance! Still I had a nice detour and entered Nairn from the East instead of from the South.

Once I got to Nairn I took advantage of FREE CAR PARKING. This is not so easy to find these days when councils want to penalise motorists. If I had travelled to Nairn by Public transport I would have had to leave the day before and would have been lucky to get home again by Sunday. I like driving. I like rock garden plants. I like my car. SRGC shows. Would they be so successful without private transport? My first visit to an sRGC show was the Highland Group show held in the early 1970's in Inverness. Jim Sutherland, who was convenor of the group inspired me. I am grateful to him for what has become my passionate hobby .





Auriculas are very popular at the Highland show. Exhibitors stage large plants on the benches; the nurseries sell many different varieties and Graeme Butler of Rumbling Bridge Nursery staged this wonderful exhibit of Show, alpine, border and double varieties. Graeme is President of the Scottish Branch of the Primula & Auricula Society. Each year he grows hundreds of seedlings from which he selects a few to grow on and offer to his customers. Graeme's plants are well grown and well presented. The range of colours and combinations is remarkable considering they are descended from yellow alpine Primula auricula, hybridised with other European species. Still popular in the North of England as well as here, Auriculas are fascinating. Even controlled crosses yield unexpected results in the seedlings. They were often grown by miners in small back gardens. It is easy to imagine their excitement as each spring new seedlings flowered for the first time. Classical presentation demands a single rosette with a single flower stem as Graeme has shown above. Scottish Rockers tend to be allowed their plants to grow bigger and show them with several flower stems. However you grow them, specialising in Auriculas is an absorbing hobby.



The Culloden Cup for best Primula in the show went to a big Auricula 'Black Jack' shown by Francis and Margaret Higgins. As you can see it had hundreds of flowers. Anne Vincent of Ardersier used dark auricula flowers to great effect in her floral arrangement. Although it was placed third I thought it was very effective. Who have imagined Sempervivums in a vase? First [bottom left] in the class went to Lorna MacDonald of Longmorn and second [bottom centre] to Hamish MacIntosh of Nairn.

Each exhibit contained many different species. Lorna's selection had more of an alpine feel than Hamish's and I think that tipped the decision between first and second. All three were superb. All we needed was a wee wedding to go with the floral arrangements.





Primula auricula 'Sirius'



Primula auricula 'Sirius'



Primula auricula 'Lemon Sherbet'



As you can see there were lots of Auriculas. Jimmy MacDonald who won the George Roslyn Trophy for Most Points in section II had two in his 6 pan class. Hamish MacDonald who was 2nd had 4 Auriculas. I liked the delicate Lemon Sherbet at the top although it came 2nd to 'Sirius'.





Primula 'Garryard Guinivere' is an old favourite. I think it must be a favourite in the North where it grows superbly well. 'Drumcliffe' is similar and 'Claddagh' is a nice burnt yellow shade. All three have that yellow eye.





Androsace armeniaca
macrantha



Every show has a surprise for me. At Nairn in Class 1 it came courtesy of Stan da Prato, It was a straggly Androsace with lovely umbels of white flowers atop stems which were 10 inches long. 'Not an ideal show plant', was my first thought. Closer examination of the flower-head revealed their true beauty. It was *Androsace armeniaca* var. *macrantha*, endemic to Turkey among limestone, igneous and serpentine rocks. Its height can vary. This plant was at the top end of its range but I suppose if one were growing among rocks it might need long stems to get noticed and pollinated.

Another *Androsace*, this time from much further north, shown by Francis & Margaret was *Androsace elatior*, also quite new to me. This had smaller pink umbels of flowers again on disproportionately long stems. Ian Bainbridge produced a drawing which Duncan Lowe had made for his *Androsace* book. This one is Chinese, from woodlands on north facing slopes in damp rock crevices. Both species can have pink or white flowers. These loose plants are quite different from the cushion *Androsaces* we often see on the show bench.



Stan da Prato's winning entries in Class 1 and in Class 2. Note the *Androsace armeniaca* in the centre of Class 1.

Nice *Gentiana verna*!



How often do you see a *Lewisia* as big as a *Rhododendron*? The *Andromeda* at the back won a Forrester medal for Stan at Nairn a couple of years ago.



Erigeron 'Canary Bird' won the Weir Shield for 'Best Plant in Show, Exhibited by a Member of the Highland or Moray Groups' for Margaret and Francis Higgins. 'Canary Bird' was raised in the 1960's by Jack Drake of Inschriach Nursery, who recognised it as a seedling which was different from others in the pot. He grew it on and sold it for many years. Jean Wyllie was one grower who maintained it and showed it for many years, however none was as big as this one. A fabulous achievement!

The biggest plant of Morisia monantha which I have ever seen won the Dubarney Salver for Best Plant in section II, shown by Colinne Souter of Aberlour. A wonderful dome of flower and foliage. I



don't know what Sardinia and Corsica, where it grows in sand at sea level, have in common with Aberlour in Strathspye, but the plant seems equally happy in both. I wonder if they drink whisky and eat Shortbread on the Mediterranean islands? This yellow beautiful crucifer is an aristocratic member of the Brassicaceae, cousin to Cauliflower, Broccoli, Cabbage, Rapeseed, Mustard, Lettuce and Radish as well as Night-scented stock.





Arisaema aff. auriculatum . The smallest Arisaema in the World?
 Salix reticulata a Scottish native. One of our smallest trees?
 Sisyrinchium striatum from South America
 Erodium trifolium from the Atlas Mountains
 Benthamiella patagonica Forrest medal winner a few years ago!
 Muchdenia rossii 'Shishiba'
 Larix kaempferi nana
 Celmisia coriacea by Inverness's expert Celmisia grower Olive Bryers

Second to none!





Lots of interesting plants from all over the world





Sempervivum 'Terracotta Baby'



Sempervivum arachnoideum



Sempervivum 'Mrs Giuseppe'



Jovibarba ciliatum var. borisii



Jovibarba 'Harmony'



Sempervivum 'Reinhard'

Sempervivum / Jovibarba. Together, they are known as 'Houseleeks' because they often grew on house roofs in alpine regions. Also, together they are known colloquially as 'Hens and Chicks'. This refers to the way that young rosettes grow from the mature rosettes. What's the difference? For many years they were all Sempervivum, then someone decided that they raised their chicks differently. Sempervivum chicks are attached under the hen rosette but many Jovibarba species hold them over the top of the adult plant. The chicks are attached by delicate brittle stems which break easily and the chicks roll away to root elsewhere. This has given rise to the name 'rollers'.

Jovibarba heuffelii is different. New plants grow between their leaves. The new plants clump up without rolling away. Its mature rosettes appear to, or maybe actually do, split in two to forming new plants. The other difference is in the flowers which in both form on a stem growing from the centre of the rosette. Sempervivum flowers tend to be pink and are upward facing and star shaped. Jovibarba flowers tend to be yellow or white outward facing bells.

Sempervivum means 'live forever'!

Jovibarba means 'Jupiter's beard'!



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Certificate of Merit

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RIGHLAND SHOW 2017



Iris lutescens



Narcissus 'Little Soldier'



Narcissus 'Hawera'



Fritillaria meleagris alba



Tulipa aucheriana



Tulipa humilis



Hannah MacDonald's
winning trio



Stan da Prato's *Rhododendron kaempferi* hybrid 'Connie' was Best Rhododendron

Rh. keiskei 'Yaku Fairy' below from David Millward. This variety won the joint Forrest /Farrer medal at Alpines 81 for Kath Dryden when it was not much bigger than this one!

White flowered Rh. burmanicum from David & Carol Shaw

