



THE ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY CENTRAL SUSSEX GROUP



NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2005

Mr. & Mrs. PALMER ATHENS TO ARCADIA - ARCHAEOLOGY, MYTHOLOGY AND PLANTS OF THE PEOLOPONNESE

Based on two spring visits, the talk was presented by Irene, with the photographs taken by Irene (landscapes) and John (close ups).

We began the journey at the south-eastern tip of the mainland with a dawn view of Cape Sounion, its Temple of Poseidon, built in 444BC at the same time of the Parthenon, dramatically silhouetted on its 65m. craggy promontory. Byron was inspired by it and Huxley loved its plants, among them in the garrigue (Gk. Phrygana), the Tassel Hyacinth *Muscari comosum* (*Leopoldia comosa*) distinguished by its upper violet-blue flowers on long stalks and the Sea or Winged Lavender *Limonium sinuatum*. To Athens and a view from the site of the agora up to the Parthenon. Narrow paths with poppies and mignonettes wind past small homes made colourful by potted plants and lead to the Acropolis with its imposing Parthenon, which has suffered damage from archaeologists, exploding Turkish gunpowder in 1687 earthquakes and pollution. By its side the Erectheion, an elegant small temple which has six larger-than-life maidens (the caryatids) taking the place of columns. A view back over the city with the Temple of Hephaesteion, practically intact apart from the roof, which was later to become the Church of St. George.

Now to the Peloponnese¹ via the Corinth Canal 80km. from Athens, its canal linking the Ionian (via the Gulf of Corinth) and Aegean Seas. A good impression of the 6km. long by 2.3m. wide canal cut through solid rock (in its present form built between 1882 and 1893) is gained from the road bridge 40m. above the water. On the way up to the massive bastion of Acrocorinthos, disturbing locals gathering wild asparagus tips, large numbers of scarlet *Anemone coronaria* and *Euphorbia wulfenii* ssp. *characias*. The site was the acropolis of ancient Corinth, but the present fortifications are essentially the work of the Venetians at the end of the 17thC. although there are remnants of many earlier cultures. We had views of the ramparts, of a Wild Pear *Pyrus pyraster*, the Milk Thistle *Silybum marianum* with its striking white veined and blotched foliage, the white flowered Dead Nettle *Lamium moschatum* and *Anthemis chia* with white flowers and a yellow disc. Up ever increasing steep steps, the Wild Peach *Prunus persica*, its deep pink flowers appearing before the leaves, the fragrant yellow flowered Wallflower *Cheiranthus cheiri*, *Onosma frutescens* with bristly stems, very hairy leaves and tubular, golden-yellow flowers tinged with purple and at its 575m. summit the bristly-hairy, yellow flowered *Alkanna orientalis*.

Down to sea level and Epidavros (or Epidaurus) the sanctuary of Asclepias, the son of Apollo, with its dramatic 4thC. BC theatre that seats 14,000 in 55 rows rising 22.5m., the acoustics so good that

¹ Named from Pelops, son of Tantalus who invited the gods to eat the flesh of his son to test their power of all knowing. Pelops was later cursed and his exploits ultimately led to the downfall of the House of Agamemnon.

a penny dropped in the centre can be heard throughout and undoubtedly a revelation when Callas sang Norma here. Of the plants, *Euphorbia acanthothamnus* with its protective armour of barbed wire-like spines and *Muscari commutatum*. On to the Argolid, Mycenae and Tiryn close to Argos and Nauplia, massive hill fortresses built by the Mycenae when they left Crete after the decline of the Minoan civilisation around 1450BC. At Tiryns, *Campanula rupestris* on its 20m. wide walls. At Mycenae, the most important kingdom in Greece from 1600 to 1200BC, the principal entrance to the site is the Lion Gate which has a relief of two lionesses above the lintel. Within, Clytemnestra killed Agamemnon on his return from the Trojan war and her son Orestes killed his mother to avenge the death of his father.

Following a night at a small hotel by the sea where breakfast consisted of petits fours (!), southwards into the heartland, through a deep gorge with Judas trees (*Cercis siliquastrum*) along the roadside, acid yellow-green flowered *Euphorbia biglandulosa*, huge clumps of a very fine form of shrubby *Globularia alypum* with dark centres, *Anemone coronaria*, a mixed rock garden, white daisies and at the top of the pass an alpine area with snowy mountains, pink flowered *Aethionema saxatile graecum*, *Anemone blanda*, *Iris unguicularis* with a greengage scent and a flowering plum. Eventually back to the east coast of the most easterly of the three pronged peninsulas at Monemvassia, (298/383) known as the Gibraltar of Greece from its 300m. precipitous rock which (apart from a causeway) separates it from the mainland, its fortifications 16th C Venetian and there are many churches and Renaissance houses. Of its flowers we were shown *Chrysanthemum coronarium*, *Reseda alba* the White Mignonette, large clumps of Hoary Stock *Matthiola incana*, some variegated, and heavily spotted, pink flowered *Orchis tridentata*.

Modern Sparta lies in the valley between the Taigetos (39/55) and the Lakonia mountains north of the Mani (the central prong) and above it to the west, the much more exciting three tiered city of Mistra (39/51-2) occupied from the 13th C to the 18th C, rising to 621m. at the now ruined castle. This was the most picturesque and fascinating of all the classical sites seen, with Byzantium churches and houses, but this once prosperous and well populated city was sacked by Turks, Albanians and Egyptians and finally deserted for New Sparta. On the final rampart where was a Giant Orchid *Barlia robertiana*, Anemones and Gageas

Moving into the Mani Peninsula, the orchids *Orchis tridentata*, *O. quadripunctata*, twin-eyed *Ophrys argolica*, *Malcomia maritima*, Verbascums, *Cyclamen repandum* ssp. *peloponnesiacum* with deep coloured mouths in woodland, *Cercis siliquastrum* and the Fodder Vetch *Vicia villosa*. On the west side of the peninsula, white flowered shrubs, more Judas trees, fritillaries, euphorbias, *Chrysanthum coronarium*, heavenly scented *Calycotome villosa* and yellow flowered *Asphodeline lutea*. Just north of Areopoli at the end of the main road which crosses the Taigetos from Githio, there is magnificent coastal scenery at Nea Itilo, very colourful in subdued evening light. Tower houses built as refuges and fortresses are a feature of the Mani and are in the process of being restored by skilled Albanians. The area is awash with flowers – Phlomis, *Saponaria calabrica*, the hairy annual Pink Hawksbeard *Crepis rubra*, vetches under old olive groves, *Anemone coronaria* and the Orchids *Ophrys speculum* the Mirror Orchid with shining blue lips, *O. tenthredenifera*, the Sawfly Ochid, some forms with pale cream flowers, some with deep pink flowers, *O. spruneri* its lip with an H-shaped pattern, *O. fusca*, *O. lutea* and *Serapias vomeracea* ssp. *orientalis* in which bees shelter overnight. Also shown were the endemics *Muscari neglectum* and *Veronica peloponnesiaca*, plus *Vicia melanops* with black and green flowers, deep-violet and cream-flowered *Cerinthe retorta* with purple splashed foliage in an olive grove and mulleins amidst swathes of wild gernaiums. Vathia (298/378) at almost the southernmost tip of the Mani is one of the most accessible of the tower villages, some converted for tourist use. Towards Mianes the most southerly of the villages by Cape Tenaro (Matapan) (298/378), in a kartic landscape, *Reseda alba*, scarlet flowered *Tulipa boetica*, the Scotch thistle-like *Onopordon illyricum* with silver white haired foliage, an almost black *Cerinthe retorta*, *Anthemis chia*, *Ornithogalum*s, *Gynandiris sisyrinchium* flowering after lunch, *Symphyanthra cretica* like

a Campanula, but with anthers fused around the style, and deep yellow *Chrysanthemum coronarium*.

Much further north west lies Olympos, the ancient city a complex of temples, religious and public buildings and site of the original Olympic Games held from 776 BC to 394 AD. This is the remote mountainous area of Arcadia where under blue skies, Judas trees and almonds will be flowering in early spring., together with mauve *Anemone coronaria*, *Orchis lactea*, handsome pink Lamiums, *Aubrieta deltoidea* on walls, *Gagea arvensis*, *Scilla bifolia*. and *Cyclamen repandum*. There are charming villages, like Krestena, Andritsena and Dimitsana, stone sheep enclosures and our journey of discovery ended with a splendid photo of a giant feast of scarlet *Anemone coronaria*..

This was a fascinating journey into a region of Greece where recently bulbs seem to have the main interest of those writing articles for the Bulletin, but this evening's talk showed us how much more there is to see, not only for the variety of its flora, but its mythology and history so ably presented by Irene and illustrated with superb photographs.

Some Bulletin references - 39/44, 25/89, 29R2 52-3, 168/138, 188/131, 254/272, 314 (Mani-Crocus), 268/218 (Mainly bulbs), 298/367 (Bulbs)

Floras – Mediterranean wild flowers by Blamey and Grey-Wilson

Flowers of Greece & the Aegean by Huxley and Taylor

Plants of the Peloponnese by Strasser

For more on the Mani see the classic book by Patrick Leigh Fermor: Mani - Travels in the Southern Peloponnese

Landscapes Of Southern Peloponnese (Sunflower Books, ISBN: 1856912248)

The Mountains of Greece – a walker's guide pp.156-165 (Cicerone)

Nagel's Greece – Travel Guide (much on mythology, and history)

<http://www.greektourism.com/>

Map of Greece. Detailed Greek map for travel planning. ... Peloponnese and Zakynthos (835k); Eastern Peloponnese, Attica, Southern Evia, Western Cyclades, ...

www.greeklandscapes.com/maps.html - 34k

<http://www.greeklandscapes.com>

2005 /06 Subscription Rate Reminder

Members suggested at the AGM that we increase subscriptions to £7.50 for single membership, and £10 for family membership. Your Committee at its last meeting, considered this suggestion, but in the interest of fairness, are suggesting that you agree to a standard rate of £7.50 for all members i.e. no discount for couples. This was agreed by the membership and becomes the new subscription rate payable from September 2005.

Meeting 8 October

Gwen and Phil Phillips will be will once again talking to us on 'Sarracenia to Trillium'; presumably this will be plants in the genera between these two. In any event, those of you who have heard them before, will know this will be a a super talk illustrated by their award winning slides. Don't miss it!

Sussex Show at Horsham 15 October

Lionel Reuben the Show Secretary is in need of volunteers to assist in setting up this important main AGS Show on the Friday evening from 4.30 onwards. When complete, the customary fish and chip supper! Please give him a call on 01825 723453.

Audrey Dart would also like assistance in the kitchen on the 14th/15th and any food that you can provide would be appreciated. Please call her on 01273 492807

