



THE ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY CENTRAL SUSSEX GROUP



NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2007

MR. DAVID BROWN FLORA OF THE PATAGONIAN ANDES

Argentinian Patagonia stretches from about 35°S to 55° a distance of about 2200km and covering an area of 770,000Km² (cf. France 550,000). According to legend, the region owes its name to the Tehuelches. They were very tall, with well-developed bodies so the Spaniards called them "Patagones", relating them to a giant called "Patagón", a character in a novel popular at the time. David's journey took him by air, bus and catamaran from Buenos Aires to the wine growing area of Mendoza, to foggy Santiago (almost surrounded by mountains) and Puerto Montt in Chile, south to El Calafate for the Moreno glacier and back north to Bariloche, the largest ski resort in South America and its own airport.



Ourisia poppigii

North of Puerto Montt on the western shore of Lake Llanquihue with views of the symmetrical volcanic cone of Osorno, there are nineteenth century German villages, among them Frutillar, with its Museum of German Settlement. Around here the fuschia-like flowers of *Ourisia poppigii* with scarlet tubes and exerted stamens and en route back across the Andes the spectacular *Embothrium coccineum*, the Chilean fire bush with its brilliant orange-scarlet long-tubed flowers.



Bariloche and Cerro Catedral



On Cerro Catedral



Patagonian Express

With long lines of trucks and customs, the Andes crossing back to Bariloche takes about 90 minutes. 50 miles to the south the impressive 3,554m Mt. Tronador (257/289, 272/234) straddling the border. Above Bariloche, Cerro Catedral with views across the L-shaped Lake Napua Hupei to the end of a branch of the 75cm "Ferrocarril General Roca" (Patagonian Express line) the only remaining line on the American continent that still is exclusively steam powered and now local government run. A picnic by the side of a 4-wheel vehicle with a very bitter brew of mat taken up through long straws. Identification of the flowers seen came with the help of Lorraine Green, a friend of Marcela Ferreyra one of the authors of 'The high mountain flowers of the Patagonian

Andes'. On Cerro Catedral (229/246, 230/321, 257/257, 288) in scree, *Sisyrinchium arenarium* with brown-marked pale yellow flowers, the trailing *Ephedras frustillata* a yellow flowered prostrate shrub, the quite tall, globose, yellow flowered *Calceolaria* aff. *biflora* with white spotted foliage, a yellow flowered cactus, the umbellifer *Mulinum spinosum* forming thorny hummocks in rocky terrain, and spiny mats of the Patagonian Scarlet Gorse *Anarthrophyllum desideratum*. A view of the top of Cerro Catedral (229/244) with prostrate, aromatic *Oreopolus glacialis* (229/205, 247, 257/258) covered with two shades of yellow flowers on a 1 in 5 slope of dusty volcanic scree. It can be very windy and snowbound at the end of November 2005 - Robert Rolfe found most of his plants on the first day of his week (230/325). A picnic in intense light. *Oxalis adenophylla* 230/318, 257/257, 293, 272/236) with glandular foliage and white to pink silky petals. The much less known *Oxalis erythrorhiza* (257/258, 272/234) is a shrub forming tight yellow-flowered, flat and hard square-shaped cushions, foliage in rosettes. Highlight of the day was *Valeriana philippiana* with white to pale pink narrowly bell-shaped flowers and distinctive fern-like leaves. *Erigeron leptopetala* or the very similar *E. schnaki* carries white or lilac daisies. *Armeria maritima* is one of those strangely named plants which seems equally at home on sea cliffs or a long way away from any maritime influence. A lover of rock crevices, the white to lilac flowers of *Ourisia fragrans* (257/257) have an exquisite scent. And there were the fascinating rock-loving rosulate violas with their sempervivum-like foliage and flowers emerging towards the outside rim of the rosettes. Here *V. succulus*, leaves with a dark red margin and whitish flowers and the similar *V. dasyphylla* (257/253, 272/238) distinguished (if that is the word!) by its disagreeable scent. The well camouflaged *V. columnaris* is very variable and develops on maturity into a spirally arranged column, the white to violet flowers emerging from the sides. On very crumbly steep scree, *Ranunculus semiverticillatus* (257/287, 272/237) with tiny grey-green foliage and lovely silky whitish to pink flowers with a yellow boss on violet-purple stems, each flower 4cm or more across; it is a snow melt plant, followed after by baking hot conditions. A member of the Asclepiadaceae, *Cynanchum nummularitolum* v. *biflorum* has yellow edged leaves and milky stems carrying yellowish to brown flowers. The sight of a condor with a 12ft. wingspan was fine end to a wonderful day.



Viola columnaris



Ranunculus semiverticillatus



Quinchamalium chilense

Further north, a view across the tree-fringed lake from Llao Llao ski resort and near Villa de Angostura the ski resort of Cerro Bayo, around which are cinnamon coloured myrtles and many introduced lupins. The Cerro Bayo is one home to *Quinchamalium chilense* (177/224) with filiform succulent leaves aligned along the stem on which sits intense yellow to orange flowers in clustered heads. There are very common *Gaultheria pumila* with white and pink edible berries and huge

shrubby cushions of *Bolax gummifera* (272/230) in dusty scree. and *Calandrinia colchaguensis* (181/232, 280/257) with long linear leaves and pink flowers in the centre of the rosettes.

Finally a look at El Calfate (257/283, 272/233), Lake Argentino and the spectacular Moreno Glacier which moves a few centimetres a day and from which great chunks break off the ice cliffs.

In this re-acquaintance of Andean plants we were shown some of the better and lesser known species and some spectacular scenery. For the more elderly of our members, the existence of ski resorts has the bonus of mechanical facilities that can get us to the heights; even if we miss something on the way up, we then have more energy and more time to look around ! Thank you David and continue your travels.

For the areas around Bariloche see Bulletin 257 (Special South American Issue), 229/246, 230/321 and 272/226. For a wider view (Argentina and Chile) see John Watson's pioneering 1971 and 1972 trips – 15 articles in Bulletins 172 to 190.

A handy pocket guide to 170 species is 'Flores de Alta Montana de los Andes Patagonicos' (In Spanish and English), Editorial LOLA which has a useful introduction on the environment.

Erskine, P. (2001) 'Alpines in the Southern Andes' in: 'Alpines 2001' Scottish Rock Garden Club and Alpine Garden Society, pp. 24-28.

Web: Excellent illustrated descriptions of Violas on a 2005 tour in the Autumn 2006 AGS Ulster Group newsletter and the Ecological and Environmental Change Research Group Grupo Erskine Expedition of 2006: (file size of newsletter has been compressed, but images good to 200%)

http://www.alpinegarden-ulster.org.uk/POM/POM_Rosulate%20Viola.htm

www.eecrg.uib.no/Places/AGS/CentralPatagonia/Patagonia2006.dwt

RM

DECEMBER 15th Christmas Social Evening

End of year relaxation - no talk this evening, but an opportunity to chat, join in some fun quizzes, photo identification and enjoy some good food and drink. Come and enjoy yourselves!

MEETING JANUARY 19th

Keith Moorhouse on 'Iceland and its flora'

Please note change of programme – as agreed at the AGM
Same speaker, different subject

