

THE ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY CENTRAL SUSSEX GROUP



NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2008

SOCIAL EVENING

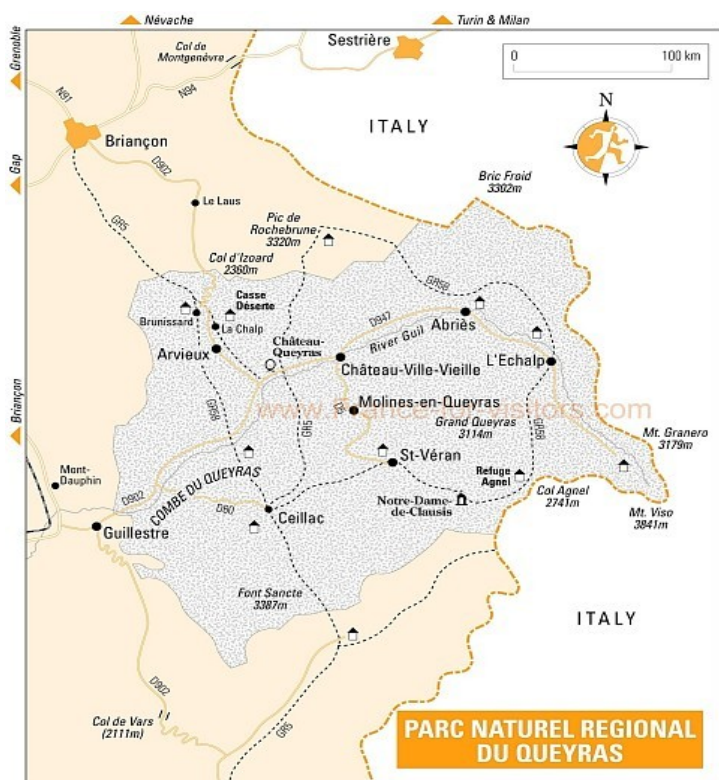
1. DAVID BROWN – A WALK TO ZERMATT



In July 2002 David went to traffic free Swiss Valais' Zermatt at 1616m in the Mattertal renowned for its view of the 4478m Matterhorn which frames the head of the valley. A cable car was taken to the topmost station for the views, a return to the first stop down and then the walk back to Zermatt for the flowers. The first picture was of a stunning deep red flowered *Saxifraga oppositifolia*. Then below an alpine hut at the tree line and in a meadow, *Globularia nudicaulis*, the seed heads of *Pulsatilla* then in seed, a red flowered *Lilium martagon*, *Gentiana acaulis* and *G. verna*. En route among others, *Sempervivum montanum*, *Aster alpinus*, deep red and pink *Dianthus*, *Nigritella nigra*, thistles, violet *Violas* with pronounced central black streaks, great spreads of *Dryas octopetala*, *Geum reptans*, dwarf yellow *Ranunculus* and a butterfly

captured on a thistle. A great place for botanical travels supported by many cableways, an overground and an underground railway and over 400km of paths.

2. ROY METCALFE – THE QUEYRAS



The Queyras lies at the south east corner of the Department of Hautes Alpes and is probably the most well defined of all the French pays in that apart from a narrow gap at the western end where the river Guil cuts a gorge before joining the Durance, it is surrounded on all sides by mountains over 2500m. It became a Parc Naturel Régional in 1977. Only 30% the area of West Sussex, its permanent population of 6500 is less than 0.1% that of the county. The only all year vehicular access is through the gorge (itself only built in its present form in the first decade of the 20thC.), the Col d'Izoard to the north (to Briançon) and the Col Agnel (to Italy) both closed from October to mid June. Very broadly the geology may be divided into two parts – the western one mainly limestone, the eastern one schists, but around some of

the high mountain rim, while ophiolites ("green rocks" originally mainly deep sea sediments and lavas now sometimes later altered to serpentines) while roughly between the two main groups and a band of gypsum and cargneules (limestone cemented by gypsum). The vegetation of the whole of the Queyras was mapped at 1/50,000 scale by botanists (or phytosociologists as they would call themselves) from the University of Marseilles between 1979 and 1982 who distinguished 36 major plant associations at 300 locations, the slides showing some examples. There are around 2000 plant species (about half the total in the British Isles) ranging from Mediterranean to alpine.

The dry schist steppe grassland which occupies the south facing slopes (adret) of the west-east section of the Guil valley upstream of Chateau-Queyras is notable for the presence of the Altai-Caucasian fox-tail astragalus, *Astragalus centralalpinus*, a majestic metre high species with chandelier-like yellow flower heads. Sub-alpine hay meadows are to be found in tributary valleys such as the Melezet and Cristallan around Ceillac, Molines and St. Veran and carry such species as *Anemone narcissiflora*, *Anthericum liliago*, *Campanula glomerata*, *Lilium bulbiferum*, *L. martagon* and *Tulipa australis*, while along the stream banks there is *Geranium sylvaticum* ssp. *rivularis* and on low stony slopes above, *Campanula alpestris*. At alpine levels (2100-2300m) the hay meadows are replaced by short turf pastures and among these the most economically important are those in the *Festuca violacea* and *Trifolium thalii* association which are grazed by cattle. They are found on all substrata, but need 8 to 9 months snow cover on flat to gentle slopes and are quite lush in early season. We saw examples from Furfande and between the Sommet Buchet and the Col des Pres de Fromage. Here will be found *Gentiana favrati*, *G. nivalis*, *Nigritella corneliana* and various *Trifolium* species. In limestone blocks between Furfande and the wall of the Crete de Croseras, *Pulsatilla alpina*. On the rocky outcrop of the Sommet Buchet *Dianthus pavonius* and *Sempervivum arachnoideum*, while south of Pres de Fromage, solution hollows in the gypsum/cargneules held ferns, *Daphne cneorum* and *Salix reticulata*. The vast limestone 800m high scree of the Casse Deserte below the Col d'Izoard, here and there interrupted by cargneule spires, seem at first glance to be barren, but they carry the non-spiny, dwarf thistle *Onopordum rotundifolium* (*Berardia subauculis* or *languinosa*), *Campanula alpestris*, *Alyssum alpestre*, *Rhamnus pumilus*, *Viola cenisia*, *Thlaspi rotundifolium* and a scattering of *Pinus mugo*. Forest covers a quarter of the Queyras of which *Larix decidua* occupies 56%. It is essentially a tree of the schists growing from 1400m to 2400m. and is much used for the open upper storeys of buildings. Every few years it suffers defoliation as the result of a moth caterpillar infestation which turns the forests into premature rusty colours, but only rarely is it a killer. *Pinus cembra*, long used for furniture, is found at the upper limit of the sub-alpine and as pure stands found only in scattered locations, particularly around Ceillac. Scots Pine is most conspicuous on both the adret and ubac (shady) steep slopes of the lower Guil (gorge and Combe) and does not penetrate eastwards beyond Chateau Queyras. A last look was made of the siliceous ophiolites. The headwaters of the Guil provides views of the impressive isolated bastion of 3841m M. Viso, but it lies entirely in Italy only kilometre from the south-eastern corner of the Queyras. In crevices of east facing 5m high rocky outcrops just above the 2746m Col Agnel, there are *Androsace* which Peter Erskine has suggested are a hybrids of *A. pubescens* and *A. helvetica*, (the plants are much tighter than *A. pubescens*), while 100m higher to the north above Col Vieux, *Geum reptans*, *Saxifraga oppositifolia* and *Petrocoptis pyrenaica*. Just to the west of Agnel in a wide shallow dip, sodden snow melt water with glistening *Ranunculus glacialis* managing to flower even after overnight snow. Further west above the 2897m Col Blanchet, feet astride the border with Italy and 300m above is the towering basalt pinnacle of the Tete des Toillies. On the scree below just emerging from the snow, the curious feature of a *Saxifraga oppositifolia* with odd flowers of *S. retusa* in its midst. Further west along the ridge, *Vitaliana primuliflora* on the windswept 2661m Col Tronchet from where there are views of the massive limestone wall of the Font Sancte at 3385m the highest peak in the Queyras and in the distance the snow capped Ecrins National Park, while southwards the peaks of the upper Ubaye, another special place.

3. JOHN GILBERT – AUTUMN COLOURS

Very appropriately John offered us many colourful autumnal photos (from John's own garden,



High Beeches, Sheffield Park, Westonbirt, Wisley (heath garden) and Polesdon Lacey to cheer us up in winter gloom. Acers provide powerful varying tints. The dense headed Tupelo tree *Nyssa sylvatica* gives us scarlet, orange and yellow foliage. *Liquidamber styraciflua* with maple-like leaves assume autumnal crimson colouring. The umbels of drooping late spring flowers of *Enkinathus* produce a second display of yellow to scarlet foliage later in the year. The leaves of wide spreading *Parottia persica* are almost the first to turn to crimson and gold and on falling to the ground can form a 6" deep

layer. Many *Sorbus* are specular in fruit – white, pink and red. *Arbutus unedo* the Killarney Strawberrry Tree has shredding deep brown bark, white flowers and red fruits produced simultaneously with both flowers and yellow fruit from the previous year. *Berberis* also fruits well. Westonbirt's Incence Cedars, *Calocedrus decurrens* were seen over a 40 year span. The overgrown rock garden at Polesden Lacey now undergoing restoration has been replanted with bulbs. *Cotinus coggyria* are well worth growing either in species form (with perhaps the best 'smoke') or those with colourful foliage. *Cornus alba* 'Siberica' has coral-crimson shoots and varieties of *Salix alba* also have brilliant new shoots in winter. *Rubus* ?? has tips which root down. The long greyish catkins of *Garrya elliptica* are fascinating. The peeling bark of *Acer griseum* can so easily be rubbed off and another bark beauty is *Betula utilis* 'Silver Shadow', a distinctive form of *jacquemontii* with unmarked pure white peeling bark. Not all *Ilex* have red berries and those with white or yellow ones make a change. *Daphne bholua* has black fruits following its reddish-mauve buds and white flowers. The young branches of *Acer palmatum* 'Senkaki' have attactive coral-red stems. *Hamamelis x intermedia* colour forms are winners with yellow, gold, orange, or red spidery petals, frosted branches becoming as good as new. A *Cedrus libani* grows on a pavement in Caterham on the Hill, but my notes of "blue lights, Tageytos and little trees on top" defeat my memory - no doubt John will remind me! *Clerodendron trichotomum* var. *fargesii* is an amazing sight with its very fragrant white flowers within maroon calyces followed by bright blue berries.

With apologies to David and John for the brevity of their pieces.

PRESENTATON TO PAUL AND MARY INGWERSEN

The first of November was a sad day when Birch Farm Nursery closed after 80 years of trading - a great loss which will be felt by Paul and his many customers. In presenting horticultural and book tokens, Edith paid tribute to Paul and Mary for their association with the Central Sussex Group over so many years, as members, hosting our local shows from their inception, assisting and providing plants at Ardingly shows at which we have exhibited and to Paul's many talks and demonstrations. They were wished a happy and restful retirement at their new home in Dormansland on moving in January.

REMAINDER OF THE EVENING

A splendid array of refreshments was enjoyed so thanks to all those who contributed and helped with their provision on the evening.

John Gilbert brought along a large array of autumn/winter foliage as an adjunct to his talk and members were invited to suggest names – how many were correctly identified is not known, but John provided all the answers.

RM

Meeting 17 January 2009 7pm

**Colin Kitchener on
The Dolomites and beyond**

We look forward to a fine start to 2009 with a talk on one of Europe's most loved areas for both its plants and scenery