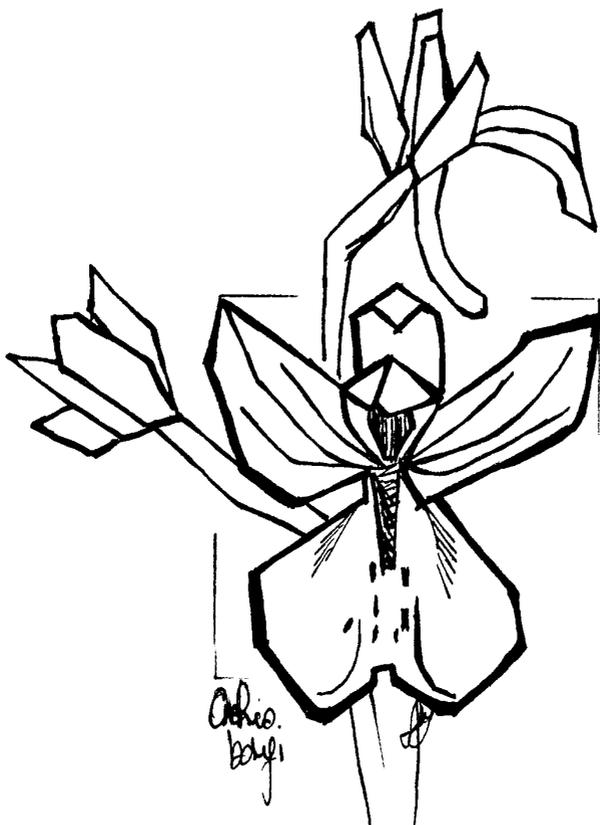


The Hardy Orchid Society *Newsletter*



No. 14 October 1999

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Enclosed with this Newsletter : Application Form for the Autumn Meeting

Information on the Autumn Meeting

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS MEETING IS FOR MEMBERS ONLY !!

PLEASE RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP AS SOON AS POSSIBLE !!

The next meeting will be on Sunday 31st October at Horticulture Research International, Wellesbourne, near Warwick. A sketch map with directions and application form is enclosed with this Newsletter. Use of the application form is **essential** this year for four good reasons: -

1) This meeting is for members only. 2) The demand for attendance is expected to be high but numbers *hopefully* will not be limited. 3) We need to produce name badges in advance and issue them on arrival, for security reasons. 4) We need an early indication of the demand for the buffet lunch. This will help us plan where the food will be presented. Those not paying for lunch will need to pay a small amount in advance to cover the cost of coffee, tea and biscuits etc.

Following some comments received after the last meeting at HRI, we have requested a buffet with more basic food and less 'fancy' food also with labelling.

A B&B list is available from Colin (please send a sae) but there is no shortage of B&Bs locally as HRI is very near to Stratford upon Avon.

Don't forget to bring your competitive photographic images – prints or slides (See next article for details of the Photographic Competition). There should be room to display any other orchid-related material that you would like to exhibit (Please forewarn us of large amounts or of posters etc.).

Plant sales tables will follow the usual arrangements - £10 for a whole table or use of space on the Society table for a few plants on the basis of 10% of proceeds to the Society.

Programme

08.30 Set-up Trade and Members Plant Sales Tables.

09.00 Meeting opens: Coffee / Tea: Informal chat. Hand in Photographic Competition entries before 09.30. Plant Sales Tables open.

- 10.00 Chairman's Introduction and welcome**
- 10.15 Demonstration of the HOS Internet Website by Tony Hughes**
- 10.45 Coffee / Tea**
- 11.00 Phillip Cribb - Cypripediums**
- 13.00 Lunch**
- 14.00 Jonathon Leake - Tripartite relationships between orchids, fungi and other plants**
- 15.00 Results of Slide Photographic Competition with Judge's Comments plus results of the Print Photographic Competition.**
- 16.00 Tea and informal chat**
- 17.15 Meeting closes. We must vacate HRI by 17.30.**

Colin Clay
Meetings Secretary

HOS 1999 Photographic Competition

Tony Hughes (Show Secretary)

The third HOS Photographic Competition will be held on Sunday 31st October during the meeting at Wellesbourne. Not surprisingly, we are retaining the three classes for 35mm slides that were introduced so successfully last year. As before, each entrant is restricted to only ***one slide per class***, and we hope to have a slot during the meeting to project them all – this is not so that you can laugh at other people's mistakes! We will also have the usual six classes for prints, with competitors free to enter up to ***three prints per class***. These prints can be produced either photographically or on computer printers. Our photo shows have been pretty good so far, but I am sure we can do better, so why not dust off a few of your pictures and let some other folk enjoy them? Or perhaps you could bring something interesting for our non-competitive exhibition area? We are planning to publicise the winning pictures on the HOS web-site - the global audience is out there waiting! Competitive classes are as follows:

1. An orchidaceous landscape, print size up to 6x4 inches.
2. A single orchid plant, print size up to 6x4 inches.
3. A close-up, print size up to 6x4 inches.
4. An orchidaceous landscape, print size up to 10x8 inches.
5. A single orchid plant, print size up to 10x8 inches.
6. A close-up, print size up to 10x8 inches.
7. An orchidaceous landscape, 35mm colour slide.
8. A single orchid plant, 35mm colour slide.
9. A close-up, 35mm colour slide.

NOTES

- a) Judging will be based on the quality of the pictures, not on the rarity of the plants.
- b) Plants may be wild or cultivated, though only 'hardy' plants are acceptable.
- c) Advance entry is not required, but all entries must be staged by 9:30 a.m. so that judging can be completed before the meeting.
- d) Prints must be un-mounted, so that they can be inserted in plastic pouches for protection when on display.
- e) You may enter up to three prints in each of classes 1 to 6, but may receive only one award per class.
- f) You may enter only one slide in each of classes 7 to 9.
- g) Pictures entered previously are not permitted but, if you bring them along, we could display them.
- h) Slides should be labelled with your name (you do want them back, don't you?) and with an alignment dot on the bottom left corner of the mount (when viewed the right way up). Any standard 35 mm slide mount should be acceptable.
- i) Sorry – we can't afford prizes, only cards, but winners are encouraged to look smug!

Society News

British Orchid Council Congress and Show

Will be held at N Wales Theatre and Conference Centre, Llandudno on 17-19th September 1999. The HOS will have a stand demonstrating the conservation work the Society undertakes.

Further details from the Society's BOC representative, Richard Nicol.

National Pleione Report



The 1999 National Pleione Report inc. Hardy Orchids is now available. It contains articles about pleiones and their culture, terrestrial orchids, Australian terrestrials in Britain, finding pleiones in Bhutan and much more.

The Report costs £3.75 inc. p&p (overseas £4.75), and is available from Peter Bradbury, 72 Blind Lane, Bourne End, Bucks, SL8 5LA.

Links with other Orchid Societies

The committee became aware of the Norsk Orkideforening (Norwegian Orchid Society) who wish to make contact with other orchid societies. NOF was founded in 1988 by hobbyists in the Oslo area. Now there are about 150 members living in all parts of Norway. Most members grow a small collection of tropical orchids, but some also specialise in hardy orchids for the garden. So far there are no professional orchid growers in Norway. NOF has been a contributory factor in the protection of Norwegian orchid species. In Norway the plant family Orchidaceae is represented by 32 species. Most orchid populations are scarce and threatened.

NOF has a website at www.toyen.uio.no/botanisk/nof/intro.htm.

Tony Hughes is making a link on behalf of the HOS. If members are aware of any other similar societies please let a committee member know.

Hardy Orchid Society Website

Members are reminded that our website is available at :

www.drover.demon.co.uk/HOS

The site is becoming increasingly interesting, and now includes photographs, book reviews and links to other relevant sites.

Cover illustration : *Orchis boryi* by Sylvia Temple

Orchid Hunting in the Dolomites

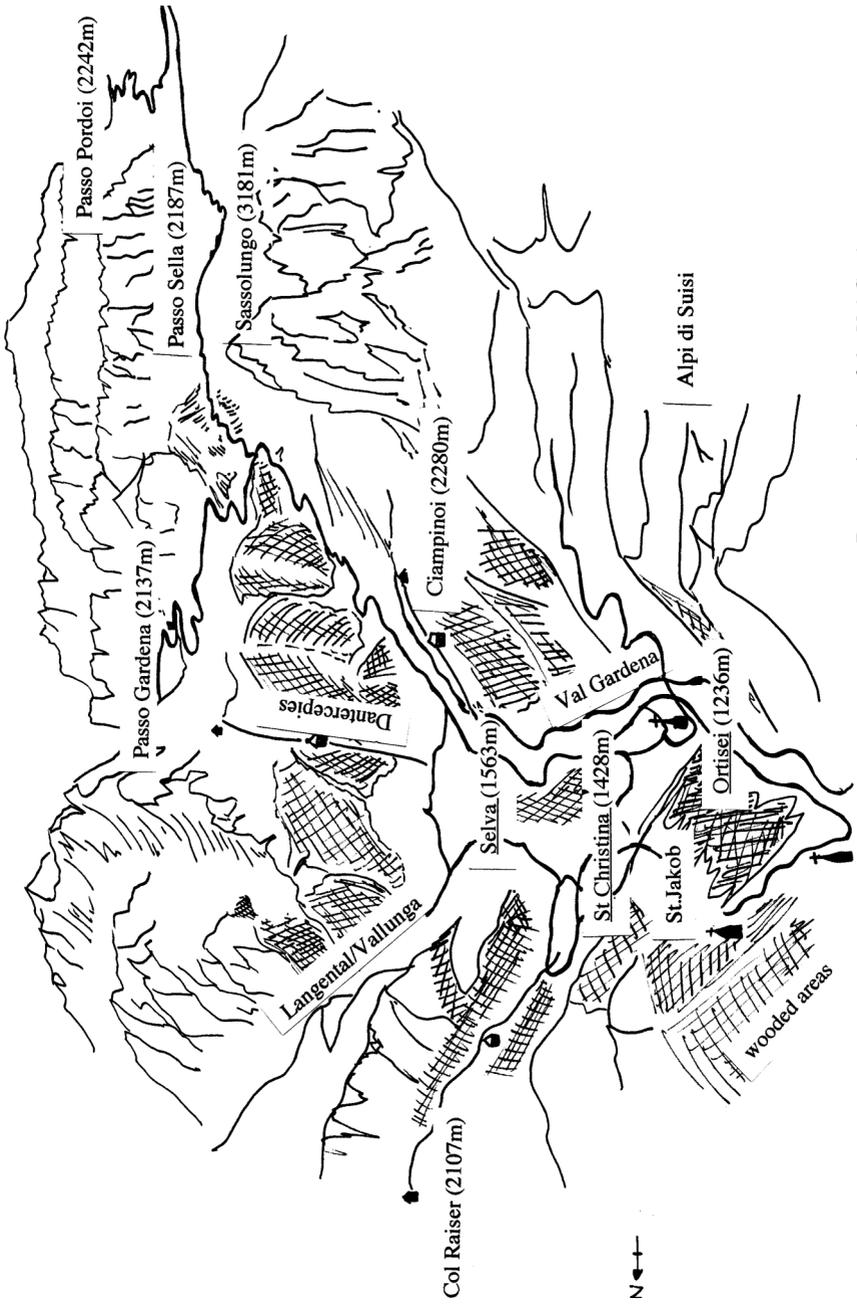
Carol Dash

The Dolomites occupy a large area in the North of Italy, joining northwards with the Swiss and Austrian Alps. The Area consists of a series of closely packed massifs each with at least one peak over 3000 metres. They form the largest self contained area within the Alpine chain – some 100km (60 miles) north-south and approx 90 km (55 miles) east-west. The geology of the area is interesting from the point of knowing where are the best places to look for orchids. Over 200 million years ago the whole area was under a tropical sea. Huge banks of coral built up into islands. These eventually became fossilised to form the rock which is known as Sciliar Dolomite – of which the main western massifs (Sciliar, Catinaccio, Latemar, Odle, Pale, Sella, Putia and Pale di San Martino) are composed i.e limestone. Two volcanoes also spilt lava out into the sea and it settled in the gaps between the islands. Today this rock can apparently be seen in parts of the Suisi, the Val Gardena, the Val di Fassa, Predazzo and elsewhere and is acidic in nature. Later in the Triassic period the area became a vast tidal flat. Layers of marine detritus were then compressed to produce the Dolomia Principale, which characterizes the eastern Dolomites of Christallo, Sesto, Pelmo, Civetta and Tofano.

Plate movement some 60 million years ago then produced the uplifting and buckling that gave rise to the Alps and the Dolomites, followed by erosion to produce the spectacular mountains that we know today.

For our interest the areas of Dolomitic limestone are the most orchidaceous. In 1998 we visited one small area based at Selva in the Val Gardena – possibly more familiarly known for the World Cup downhill races. This year (1999) we returned to this area but also extended the visit to include the area around Predazzo and up to the Passo Rolle. As you can see our travels are limited. The area is vast and so in no way is this meant to be an overall account of “*where to see orchids in the Dolomites*” instead it is just a small glimpse of the potential which is there. The area is beautiful – the meadows a fantastic tapestry of colour and variety – with jagged pinnacles above and around. When the weather is good the scenery is truly spectacular and the ruggedness of the peaks far more aggressive than anything I have seen in Austria or Switzerland.

In 1998 our 2 week holiday began on 21st June. We flew to Verona, picked up our hire car and drove north up the motorway and then east into the Val Gardena. This year we arrived on 17th June and headed initially north east to base ourselves at Predazzo. This was to allow access to the Passo Rolle – so much extolled by Lionel Bacon in Mountain Flower Holidays in Europe. On both our visits the meadows at some level were excellent – not so much in terms of orchids but flowers in general. At any time from May to August it is possible to find flowery meadows – depending on altitude the lower ones may have been cut for hay. The range of flowers is vast with clovers, clary, hawksweeds, pink umbellifers, campanulas, daisies and the odd smattering of *Geranium sylvaticum* or *Horminium pyrenaicum*. Bright or-



Panoramic view of the Val Gardena

ange flowers of *Lilium bulbiferum* zing out in the lower meadows at this time of year contrasting brilliantly with the bright blue meadow clary and the pink sainfoins. Orchids do abound in many of these meadows – usually large stands of *Gymnadenia conopsea* plus *Listera ovata*. Visiting at this time of year means that although some of the early high alpine plants are still out the very high alpine meadows are not yet fully out and the end of June is a more appropriate time for these areas. But you can't have it all ways and if we were to see the *Cypripedium calceolus* at its peak it had to be mid-June.....

Initially based at Predazzo, we could drive up the Val Travignolo towards the Rolle. This is a beautiful valley in its own right with lovely meadows either side of the road. The road climbs up towards and through the small village of Bellamonte from where it starts to pass through wooded areas. The woodland is varied and in places mixed and open. *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* is very common and in the middle of June was mostly still in tight bud. Similarly *Helleborine* sp. are common but tightly in bud or even pre-bud stage. At one point, just before the road goes over the rio Valaccia (alt approx 1400m) were several *Orchis militaris*. The plants on the left (south facing) side of the road were going over but several nice specimens were found in deeper shade on the right side of the road above the river below. Just around the corner from this site were more *O.militaris* by the road side. There was an open meadow on the left of the road banking up quite steeply to woodland above. Exploration of this revealed many nice meadow plants with *Lilium bulbiferum* just coming out and *Lilium martagon* in bud. In amongst the plants were many *Gymnadenia conopsea*, and *Listera ovata* plus the occasional *Orchis ustulata* and *Coeloglossum viride*. At the woodland edge were lots of *D. fuchsii* still to come out plus also some obviously early gone over orchids. These we deduced were *Dactylorhiza sambucina* – judging from the wizening flowers in both red and yellow forms. This was one of the plants we had hoped to find. From Mountain Flower Holidays about the Val Travignolo - “The latter valley is delightful. I have never seen roadside meadows more rich with flowers. The orchids in particular - dwarf, marsh and scented and *Dactylorhiza sambucina* – are magnificent in late June, and the military orchids a little earlier.” Bearing in mind a publication date of 1979 this still was not our experience of the valley in that the *D. sambucinas* were well over by mid June whereas the *O. militaris* were still just about presentable depending on the degree of shade. However we were pleased at having found some though disappointed not to see the carpets of fresh specimens one hopes for!

The road then passes along the side of the Lago di Paneveggio. Saxifrages tumble from the rock face to the side of the road and several large *O. militaris* specimens were found en-route – almost as big as those previously seen in the Dordogne. The track down to the lake itself is worth a quick detour with lots of *Corallorhiza trifida* under the pine trees along with *Maianthemum bifolium*. *Clematis alpina* scrambles everywhere over stumps and low branches.

Once at the Passo Rolle the walks available are plentiful. Initially we walked up onto the Cavallazza which could not really be recommended and we decided it was mainly acidic rock and therefore the flora was much diminished in comparison to that on the limestone areas. The gentle slopes to the north of the road and car parks were much more interesting. At the time of our visit the orchids were only just coming out in flower. Carpets of *Primula farinosa* are interspersed with Trumpet Gentians and Spring Gentians. Orchid wise there are lots of *Nigritella nigra* close to the turf as well as newly emerging *Listera ovata*. *Coeloglossum viride*, *Gymnadenia conopsea* and *Pseudorchis albida* are also present in amongst the alpines.

Beyond the Passo Rolle the road twists down towards San Martino di Castrozza. At one particular panoramic/picnic stop with a view down the valley to St. Martino (Richard Manuel's site) we found some interesting alpines on both sides of the road. The bank above the road had *Dact. fuchsii* in bud plus some *Coeloglossum viride* in amongst some fine specimens of *Primula halleri*. What was perhaps more amazing were the fine specimens of *Platanthera bifolia* in perfect flower standing out on this exposed position. There were approx 20 clumps making an impressive display.

The road then descends through woodland. Stops at any stage will reveal *Dact. fuchsii*, *Listera ovata* and *Coeloglossum viride* plus alpine meadow plants of *Geranium sylvaticum*, *Horminium pyrenaicum*, *Trollius europaeus* and *Aquelegia atrata* (a lovely very dark almost black columbine). In fact the roadside verges are lush and colourful. Bacon writes very favourably about this stretch of road and describes plentiful "Lady's Slipper Orchid...which used to keep the restaurant flower-vases filled in San Martino". Without a great deal of hope at finding any we did drive along the road through the open coniferous woodland. Amazingly we found large numbers of plants growing in the semi-shade only feet from the road side!! Quite incredible – over 100 clumps of various sizes and obviously a healthy colony. So, much film was used ! They ranged from plants still in bud to perfectly out, with a



range of lip shapes and strength of colour plus a variety of shapes and depth of colour of sepals and petals. In some the sinsepals were split. At the end of our holiday when we could not resist another look! They were really past their best and also the vegetation/grasses had grown up substantially making the plants very much harder to spot even though we knew they were there. So we had seen what we came for and in good weather and at perfect flowering stage. We did go on to visit sites for which we had accurate directions from fellow members later in the holiday and I do think that in this season the timing at the beginning of the holiday was perfect for *Cyp. calceolus* at the altitudes we found it.

The next stage in our holiday we moved on north and west to the Val Gardena returning to the excellent apartments we stayed in during 1998. The Val Gardena is a large deep valley with steep sides variably wooded. The area around Selva where we stayed is dominated by the huge hunk of rock called the Sassolungo at 3181m. This is a truly magnificent sight particularly at sunrise and sunset as the rock glows rosy pink. The Val Gardena is much busier and more touristy than the Predazzo area with access through Selva up to the spectacular four passes. This does however provide a vast choice of habitat and scenery for the visitor. The walking possibilities are endless and varied in terms of difficulty, orchids will be found virtually everywhere. *Gymnadenia conopsea* and *Listera ovata* are common in the meadows. *Dact. fuchsii* is also very common in the woodland edges along with *Coeloglossum viride*. One particularly nice day is to take the chair lift up to the Col Raiser to the north of Selva and St. Christina. This takes you up to 2107m – a word of warning DO NOT go up if there is a cloud in the sky! On our first visit the high meadows were glorious with carpets of *Nigritella nigra* and *rubra* interspersed with *Pedicularis verticillata*, *Pulmonaria angustifolia* and stunted *Trollius europaeus*. It does seem that the *Nigritellas* growing on the Dolomitic limestone show a wide range of flower colour variation from yellowish cream through red to dark red almost black. These colour variations we found in several places but in particular up the Langental valley to the north west of Selva. Similarly there are a large range of colour forms of *Gentiana verna* from the normal brilliant gentian blue through to smoky grey/blue. We guess this must have something to do with underlying mineral richnesses? And feel reluctant to split the *Nigritellas* into different species or even varieties. Continuing down from the Col Raiser, *Gymnadenia conopsea* and also *odoratissima* with its narrow leaves were also plentiful. The walk down the hill is very flowery with lots of gentians and pasque flowers as well as *Scutellaria alpina*, *Campanula barbata*, *Globularia repens* and *Geum montanum* and so on and so on. Interspersed were *Coeloglossum viride* again and *Listera ovata* as well as *Pseudorchis albida*. Many of the areas are fenced off for grazing which is markedly bare however there is plenty to see around these areas. This year the high meadows were not yet out and then we got covered in snow so we didn't see the lower meadows! In 1998 it rained HEAVILY during the descent causing torrents down the paths. But there are some nice damp areas even when it doesn't rain with King Cups and *Dact. majalis* plentiful.



In search of different habitats we walked at a lower level in the Val Gardena, this time through the south facing meadows and woods around St. Jakob, between Or-

tisei and St. Christina. This is much lower around the 1500m mark and so one can see a later flora in the meadows. Helleborine species were however still tightly in bud. However the *G. var odoratissima* were nicely out. In the open mixed, mainly coniferous woods, there were lots of *Platanthera bifolia* (so I could have **yet** another lesson in identification) plus masses of *Corallorhiza trifida* (going over slightly) and good fresh stands of *Neottia nidus-avis*. Despite looking suitable for *Cyp. calceolus* we did not find any – let us know if you do! Another orchid found in the meadows along here was *Traunsteinera globosa* pretending to be a cross between a scabious and an allium! Not the most spectacular of orchids but interesting nevertheless and quite a pretty flower when examined closely. They were not exactly in profusion but then they are fairly camouflaged so there may have been more than we saw!

So – this is but a brief taster for this beautiful area. If you are interested in alpine orchids and alpenes in general you will not be disappointed by the Dolomites!

Accommodation

Being out of season it was easy to find good priced accommodation at excellent standard in Predazzo. Our accommodation in the Val Gardena was actually at La Selva, (at the La Selva Residence) which is just outside and above `Selva itself (therefore a lot quieter). In 1998 we booked this through Inghams Lakes and Mountains but it does not appear in this brochure anymore. The apartments are self catering and are finished to an extremely high standard, they had just been completed in 1998 but we were not disappointed on our revisit in 1999. We can provide more information if anyone is interested or contact “La Selva” Residence, 39048 Selva Gardena, Wolkenstein Groden, Bolzano Italy. E-mail:hotel-gran-baita@valgardena.com

Acknowledgements

Thankyou to Paul Harcourt Davies, Tony Hughes, Richard Manuel, Moira and Simon Tarrant for their site information prior to our first visit in 1998.

References

Mountain Flower Holidays in Europe by Lionel Bacon for the Alpine Garden Society – Out of print at present but rumoured to be being reprinted?

Wild Orchids of Britain and Europe by Paul and Jenne Davies with Anthony Huxley, Hogarth Press

The Alpine Flowers of Britain and Europe, Christopher Grey-Wilson, Collins.

Wild Italy – A traveller’s Guide by Tim Jepson, Sheldrake Press

Maps – we used the Tabacco, Carta Topografica 1:25000 range, which are widely available in Italy or from the Map Shop, Upton upon Severn.

A Tale of Two Field Trips

Norman Heywood

The first field trip

On Saturday 12th May 1999, a rather cloudy and windy day, about twenty-five members of the Hardy Orchid Society joined the British Orchid Council Species Group for a Hardy Orchid day on Box Hill in Surrey. There were a total of forty-two people in attendance. We met at Juniper Hall, a Field Centre giving courses on a whole range of natural history and related subjects in very pleasant surroundings. I remember it from fifty years ago. The day was organised such that the morning was composed of lectures and the afternoon to be spent seeing the “beasties” in the wild.

The morning started with a series of slides and an informative talk on the species we were likely to see during the day, given by David Slimming (who became a member of our Society during the day).

This was followed by a talk by Norman Heywood, on the culture of hardy orchids. This started from seed to flasking, replating, planting out into man-made compost and growing on to flowering size, with tubers and rhizomes at all stages being stripped of compost so that their growing needs could be better understood. The situation in the garden or wild flower meadow was also discussed.

Then as a total change we had a slide show of all the butterflies we should have seen if the weather had been warmer, followed by lunch.

The walk started, we were treated to the following species : - Common Spotted Orchid, Greater Twayblade, Man Orchid, Bee Orchid, White Helleborine, Musk Orchid, Fragrant Orchid and Pyramidal Orchid, and plants of Broad-leaved Helleborine, obviously not yet in flower.

As we returned from Box Hill quite early in the afternoon, I offered to try and find the Fly Orchids which were growing in deep shade in a beech wood towards Ranmore Common on the other side of the Mole Valley, mind you that was fifty years ago! Only I knew that we had about two miles of narrow lane with passing places to get to the site. But I did not know that the Morgan 4 + 4 Club had picked the same road in the opposite direction for their day in the leafy lanes of Surrey. There were nine cars in our convoy keeping quite close together, as nobody else knew the roads. The final coming together with eighteen of the Morgans was just short of the Fly Orchid site, which I'm pleased to say they had not deserted. They also kept company with more Broad-leaved Helleborines. We continued up onto the common, for a walk which was singularly unrewarding. We could see some of the problems of different countryside users, the byways were unwalkable owing to motorbikes and other off-road vehicles having used them and turned them into deeply rutted quagmires. Never mind if the countryside was a little sterile in that area, we had seen a number of nature's little gems during the day.

The second field trip

Twenty-six members arrived at New Gate Farm on Saturday 31st July 1999, to see Helleborines around the lanes of Dorset. We consolidated ourselves into six cars, and proceeded, covering quite a wide area. We were able to see a number of *Epi-pactis purpurata*, the Violet Helleborine, at a site close to Sturminster Newton. This is a large population growing in its normal habitat of hazel coppice, with open oak and ash standards. Martin Jenkinson, who was leading the day's trip, surveys this site every year, and the site is specifically managed for the Helleborines. Whilst there we saw a fine selection of butterflies, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Ringlet, Speckled Wood, Silver Washed Fritillary, and the dark form, valezina, Painted Ladies, Small Tortoiseshells, Holly Blue, Brimstone, Large and Green Veined White, Purple Hairstreak and Peacock.

Our next site was a roadside situation where we were able to see plants of *E. phyllanthos*, the Green-flowered Helleborine, and then on to another roadside site where two more of our members joined us, having been delayed in the traffic. This site had had a good display of Greater Butterfly Orchids, which were of course now in seed, but with them was a superb display of Broad-leaved Helleborine, *E. helleborine*, plants in full flower and nearly three feet high. We stopped at this point for lunch. The circuit continued with a visit to an R.S.P.B. reserve, with well-managed hazel coppice, in the middle of which were unfortunately only two spikes of the Slender-lipped Helleborine, *E. leptochila*. Unfortunately these had gone over, but when checked eight days before had been in good form.

Then back to New Gate Farm, for a cup of tea, and a Dorset Cream Tea. It was a hot day, and most people chose to join in a walk through the adjoining 213 acres of Woodland Trust Wood, which I led. I am a Voluntary Warden, and organise a conservation group, The Friends of Duncliffe Wood, which carries out various conservation tasks each year. The woods have the same butterfly population as the previous site, and in fact have a butterfly transect walk within them. The woods have large populations of Early Purple Orchids, *Orchis mascula*, Common Spotted Orchids, *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, smaller populations of Greater Twayblade, *Listera ovata*, growing in grassy openings between heavily wooded areas of oak and ash, one small population of Bird's Nest Orchid, *Neottia nidus-avis*, and two of the Helleborine family; Violet and Broad-leaved.

Back to New Gate Farm again for a tour of the laboratory and tunnels. Then for the barbecue, a glass of wine or two with lots of chat, and for those with not too far to go once dusk approached, another walk into the woods to try to find glow-worms. Not the highest count ever, but we did find one female lit up, and so back to the farmyard, and the drive home.

Orchids in North Yorkshire

Tony Rymer

I was interested to read “Holme Valley Orchids” by Geoff Rollinson in the April Newsletter. Like Geoff, I live in Yorkshire, though at a somewhat lower elevation. I have been growing orchids for about fifteen years now, with varying degrees of success. The hardiness of European terrestrial orchids in northern Britain is a complex and fascinating issue. I cannot agree with Geoff’s view that the majority of orchids (which in the context of his article I assume means European terrestrial orchids) need to be maintained in a frost free environment.

Serapias, *Ophrys* and x *Orchiaceras* have generally survived here in a bulb house where temperatures of -8C have been recorded in spite of a small heater being switched on when frost threatens. These plants were plunged in slightly damp sand. Losses have only occurred when pots have been frozen solid for 24 hours or more. This has been a rare event in recent years though it happened at the end of 1996. On that occasion several pots of *Serapias* and one or two *Ophrys* were wiped out. The same cold spell, incidentally, killed off a number of dwarf narcissi and cyclamen in plunged pots.

Dactylorhiza and some *Orchis* will undoubtedly survive outdoors. Even *Dactylorhiza foliosa* from Madeira is quite frost hardy. But what about *Serapias*, *Ophrys* and x *Orchiaceras*? When I repot bulbs and orchids, the spent compost eventually ends up as top-dressing in the garden. Of course, occasionally the baby is thrown out with the bathwater. In late 1997 I noticed *Ophrys* leaves coming up in my newly constructed rockery. As they developed I decided they were *O. bombyliflora*, whose leaves bear faint longitudinal veins. The plant survived the admittedly mild winter of 1997 – 8 but did not flower. Last autumn two plants appeared and eventually flowered at the end of April. It is quite normal for *O. bombyliflora* to produce two or even three new tubers. If only the more beautiful members of the genus were as accommodating! My soil is pH7 and overlies Magnesian limestone, which may or may not be relevant, and both *O. apifera* and *O. insectifera* grow locally.

Some years ago I was given some tubers of x *Orchiaceras*, hybrids between *Aceras anthropophorum* and various *Orchis* spp. They originally came from either the Pyrenees or the cold uplands of south central France. Would they survive out of doors? In autumn 1997 I planted one in a very well drained “scree” bed with a south-west aspect. It too has survived two winters and flowered this year though it has not increased. It was in full flower when we had extremely damaging frosts (-6C on two successive nights) in April. It was completely unscathed. What is more, the leaves are still green and healthy whereas most of my Mediterranean orchids under glass are now, in mid-June, quite leafless.

Serapias are generous with their offsets and I intend to try some outdoors this year. Pride, of course, comes before a fall and it may be that the severe winter which we are sure to have sooner or later will put paid to my outdoor Mediterranean orchids. Part of the fun of gardening is, however, pushing plants to the limit and seeing what you may get away with.

Who needs Agar? **Tony Hughes**

I well remember when I was a young teenager in south Dorset, that one of my Christmas 'treats' was to scour my parents' lawn for shiny leaf rosettes, and then to erect little wire cages around them to keep the mower at a safe distance. I must have been quite good at it because, come June, Dad could usually boast a good show of Bee and Pyramidal Orchids - and no plantains ever received protection!

Since then, I have often hankered after such a lawn. Some years ago I took an easier option, which was to plant lots of spring bulbs (crocuses, narcissi, fritillaries, etc.) in the grass outside the kitchen window. I reckoned that, not only would this encourage Diana to spend more time at the kitchen sink, but also I would have an excuse to delay lawn mowing till after seed dispersal in June. Unfortunately, the first ploy failed totally, but many of the spring bulbs have multiplied and spread most successfully. More recently I went to the expense of buying a single Pyramidal plant, and a friend allowed me to 'borrow' three Autumn Lady's Tresses plants from her well-stocked patch, so at last my orchid lawn was on its way.

But there is a down side - how do I persuade dandelions that they are not welcome? My lack of imagination results in me spending several hours each May picking their flowers and attempting to extract their roots. Imagine my surprise when, last year, as I was down on hands and knees pulling and plucking, I noticed a curiously spotty leaf among the grass. Close inspection confirmed my first thought - orchid! Closer inspection suggested Common Spotted Orchid, and even closer inspection (this time of the entire unmown patch) revealed that it was not alone. About a dozen tiny plants were detected and each was marked with a plastic label (but no plant was large enough to flower in 1998).

How did they get there? Well, I have to admit to a little unofficial conservation work on a local Common Spotted Orchid site, which is always mown for hay well before the orchid seeds disperse. My ploy has been to wait until mowing is about to start, then surreptitiously gather a few well-podded orchid spikes which are allowed to ripen in a vase on the windowsill. When they are ripe, I scatter the seed back on its 'home' patch which is increasing nicely. I can only assume that 'gross negligence' on my part has allowed some of that seed to land on my lawn!

Not surprisingly, my bulb patch has been subjected to very close inspection this year. All the 12 plants from 1998 have reappeared and, thanks to the keen eyes of friends and family, a further 20 have been located. Some are merely a single narrow leaf, so I can't help wondering how many more have been missed. What with all the plastic labels, the back garden looks like a miniature graveyard. At the end of April the excitement increased when the first suspicion of a flower spike appeared. From that day, things have steadily improved and now, in mid-June, I am the (excessively) proud owner of no less than 16 flower spikes. So - who needs agar?

Book Reviews

Alan Dash

Notes on British and Irish Orchids by D. M. Turner Ettliger

Publisher – D. M. Turner Ettliger (Royden Cottage, Cliftonville, Dorking, Surrey. RH4 2JF)

ISBN 0 9530380 0 9

This book, 150 pages of A5 format, goes through each British species and gives a summary of description, distribution, habitat, flowering period and the variation to be encountered within the species. The information is clear and concise. There are no illustrations!

The book is worth considering if you haven't already got a book on British Orchids. If you have – well – there's probably not a lot of extra information in this book than in the others you may have.

Illustrations of British and Irish Orchids D. M. Turner Ettliger

Publisher – D. M. Turner Ettliger (Royden Cottage, Cliftonville, Dorking, Surrey. RH4 2JF)

ISBN 0 9530380 1 7

A companion to the above. As mentioned, no illustrations in the first book – solely illustrations (photographs) in this one. Same A5 format with quality glossy paper. An excellent collection of 519 photographs. Impressively comprehensive and could be a valuable guide to field identification because it does not rely on a single photograph of each species. There are many photographs of each type of orchid, which clearly shows the considerable variations within each species. For example, there are 16 photographs of *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and 17 of *D. ericetorum*. However with a recommended price of £26.65 you would probably think twice before actually taking it out and using it on your field trips!

Orchids in the News

Press and media reports sent in by members

Distinctive and exotic-looking *Serapias* species (tongue orchids) are native to mainland Europe; at least that is the conventional wisdom. In recent years botanists have seen three different species making advances in the British Isles. *Serapias parviflora* was discovered in Cornwall in 1989, followed by a sighting of *S. lingua* in 1992 on Guernsey. By 1996 *S. cordigera* had appeared in Kent.

In June 1998 an RHS Member from south Devon sent a photograph to Wisley showing some unusual orchids growing in a local meadow. Botanist Mike Grant provisionally identified them as *Serapias lingua*. Later this was confirmed in the field by David Lang of the Botanical Society of the British Isles. The small colony has flowered again successfully this year.

Mike explains, "As all three species occur right up to the French coast it is just a short hop across the Channel for their fine, wind-blown seeds to reach Britain." Tim Rich, an authority on British wild plants at the National Museum and Gallery of Wales, thinks that as these orchids probably arrived here unaided by human hand, there is good reason to consider them as new additions to our native flora.

(The Garden, August 1999)



All due respects to Ronnie Searle

TED UNSWORTH

GROWING MEDIA AND OTHER PRODUCTS FOR ORCHIDS

PUMICE, HUMATE, VIRESCO, CARBO-AID AND LIQUID CALCIUM

Pumice - Pumice is available in various grades including powder, 1-2mm, 2-3mm, 3-5mm, 5-10mm, 10-15mm and larger. This type of lava rock has been used for growing orchids over many years. Our pumice is now widely used by orchid nurseries and botanical gardens as well as by amateur growers. Discussion has taken place about composts for cypripedium growing for which pumice has been recommended - see "The Genus Cypripedium" by Phillip Cribb.

Humate, containing humic acid, is a root growth enhancer in liquid and granular form. Used sparingly, Humate gives better nutrient uptake, more massive roots, improved soil structure, healthier more stress resistant plants, better moisture retention and reduced fertilising. The granular form in particular is a very good food source for soil micro-organisms, boosting their numbers dramatically.

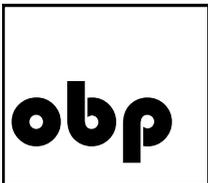
Viresco - The Viresco products contain micro-organisms along with various support materials for the micro-organisms. Viresco suppresses diseases and makes plants grow more healthy. Leaf colour moves more to the blue end of green, causing leaf pests to disappear. Viresco contains no mycorrhizal (symbiotic) fungi but increases in number those that are naturally present.

Carbo-Aid - Carbo-Aid is a carbohydrate based food supplement for microbes containing complex natural sugars, proteins, kelp and Humate. It is primarily aimed at the golf club market but may have a place in the symbiotic culture of hardy orchid seedlings.

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