



# Rock Gardening

The Newsletter of the S.W. Scotland Rock Garden Group

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**Issue 9**

**Autumn 2008**

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**From The Convenor** This gardening season has been a washout. I don't need to tell you that; so I won't! I'll speak for my own gardening season. Firstly came the Great Drought at Overholm followed swiftly and relentlessly by the Great Downpourings on Overholm. The first shattered my faith in the Divine Waterer for not knowing when to start and the second shattered my faith in the Divine Waterer for not knowing when to stop. These extremes are greatly reminiscent of the land of my birth (and of Olympic medals!). It doesn't rain for an age and when it does, it doesn't stop for an age. Which reminds me that a minister I knew there was once asked to pray for rain. 'What', he said, 'and drown a quarter million sheep! No thank you.'

At any rate in May I left the moisture-ing of my sacred and v. expensive plants in what I thought was the safe hands of the Divine Waterer while I absconded to, and dispersed myself in, Turkey for a fortnight; telling myself that it was bound to rain while I was away considering the fact that it hadn't rained for a good many weeks before I left. Such hubris was bound to be avenged by the Divine Waterer and I returned to find my plants parched and dying. That is those of them, and they were precious few in pots, still alive. It had not rained once in my absence.

Since returning it has hardly ceased raining and what with that and a stream of visitors and excursions here and there I have hardly had any time actually gardening. The sum total being one new but small flower bed prepared but not yet planted up. Not that there is any shortage of plants sitting about waiting indeed begging to get their roots in soil.

At Gardening Scotland I made the fatal mistake of taking rather more interest in a polytunnel than caution and my wallet justified. Almost before I could say to the salesman 'help yourself', I was the proud but bewildered owner of the knock-together thing. Then it sat around in pack form for weeks waiting for a spell of dry weather so that it could be 'knocked up'. Well the bleeding thing has by now cruelly turned the tables on me and knocked me up physically instead. The usual problem — an instruction manual written in a language deceptively similar to English but with subtle omissions, ambiguities, false prospects and dire forewarnings ('measure twice cut once!' etc.) which soon reduce the most confident and self-assured novice to blubbing indecisiveness. I have long held that carpentry and construction (to say nothing of plumbing) is some obscure branch of non-Aristotelian logic which the human race collectively has not yet fully fathomed. We merely grope our way tentatively forwards meantime.

Well the job is now 99% done and as soon as a doorway is cut in the cladding and a non-buckled doorframe is conjured up from Divine Waterer knows where I shall be able to enter and start using the thing!

To be serious the polytunnel is a rather superior one. It has, for example, a triple layer of polythene cladding with the inner layer consisting of 'pockets' of air so that the interior is kept at a fairly constant temperature and is dapple lit. Easy and cheap I'm hoping to keep plants warm and protected in winter. Apparently the cladding is so tough that ten people can stand on the top of the tunnel without tearing it (the cladding). I only ask myself do folks really like standing on the top of polytunnels? I remain sceptical but please let me know if you do and I will see if I can help out.

May I express my hope that you have had a tolerably pleasant summer (weather permitting) in your gardens and say that I look forward to greeting you all at our talks over the autumn/winter and especially any who are thinking of coming along to join us for the first time.

*Darrell Desbrow*

**Zander House Garden visit** As reported upon else-where our spring/summer events programme of events has been something of a disaster to put it mildly; largely due to lack of participation by the wider membership. There is still an opportunity however for the situation to be redeemed.

Sue Bedford has kindly agreed to have members to her garden at **Zander House, Cargenbridge** from **2.00 p.m. to 4.00. p.m.** on **Sunday, 21st September**. Our events programme would end on a happier note if as many members as possible could come along to Sue's garden for what promises to be an enjoyable afternoon. Besides the opportunity to view the lovely (I speak as one who has already visited) garden at Zander House, a short demonstration of seed planting (it is, after all, a good time of the year for that) is to be staged and it is hoped to have some seed to distribute to participants so that they can put theory into practice. What is more Sue has kindly undertaken to provide some refreshment.

There is no entry charge but there will be opportunity to make donation to Sue's supported charity Action Aid for those wishing to.

#### **Directions to Zander House, Cargenbridge, Dumfries DG2 8LX**

**From Dumfries** Leave on Dalbeattie Road A711. Carry straight on at Garroch Loaning mini-roundabout into Cargenbridge and take first left into Waterside Road.

Continue past the school and just beyond the derestriction signs, at the edge of the village, turn left down a farm lane, signed 'Zander House' , for 500m.

**From Dalbeattie** Enter Cargenbridge on A711. Go straight on at first roundabout, then take the road on the right, Waterside Road, **before** the Garroch Loaning mini-roundabout. Continue as above.

**From Bypass (A75)** Take Cargenbridge turning along Garroch Loaning. Turn right at Garroch Loaning mini-roundabout into Cargenbridge and take first left into Waterside Road. Continue as above.

The **farm lane is single track** with passing places only at the village end and in front of the house. Priority to first on the lane. **Parking in the field next door.**

## Autumn/winter programme 2008/2009

Usually meetings take place at **Threave Garden Visitor Centre**, Castle Douglas at **7.30 p.m.** (doors open 7.00 p.m.) **on the second Thursday of the month October through March**. Although the venue remains the same this year, **please note that there has been a change to the SECOND** (from the third) **Thursday of the month this year**. As far as can be foreseen, this will be a permanent change. It fits in better with the Ayr Group's meeting on the second Wednesday since we can now 'share speakers' to a greater extent and thus save on speakers' travelling expenses.

**An extra meeting on 9th April 2009**, has been arranged for a visit from, and shared meeting with, the Ayr Group as detailed below. Please note that this meeting will **commence at 7.00 p.m.** (doors open 6.30 p.m.).

The full programme of talks is detailed in the enclosed Syllabus and is notated in the following.

To kick things off David Millward will speak on 'Rocks, Landscape and the Alpine Garden'. David is a geologist by profession, working at the British Geological Survey in Edinburgh. As an amateur and accomplished rock gardener he is an intrepid traveller and seeker out of plants in their natural habitats. His talk will thus happily, and I am sure instructively, combine these two interests. We try to have at least one vaguely practical horticulture-based talk each season and David's talk telling us about the various types of rocks and their plant associations should adequately fill the bill.

Coincidentally David was the speaker next arranged to talk to the former SRGC Kirkcudbright Group before it 'went into liquidation'. He has thus had to wait several years to have a second chance to speak, so to speak, and I only hope that we can hang on as a viable group until October to see what I take to be his dream realised!

Julia Corden runs the Explorers (no apostrophe!) Garden in Pitlochry. That garden seeks to highlight the plant introductions of the renowned and numerous Scottish plant hunters. Recently Julia has been to Bhutan retracing partly the plant hunting exploits of George Sherriff, who, with others most notably Frank Ludlow, introduced the cream of Himalayan flora to the United Kingdom and to Scotland in particular. Her talk in November will be an account of that trip.

For the December meeting Robert Unwin, who has previously talked to us on the Tasmanian flora, as short-notice replacement, is to make a welcome (by me at least!) return this time 'Talking Turkey'. Having recently returned from a plant holiday (my fourth) in Turkey with more bits and bytes than I know what to do with, I cannot wait to see and hear what he has to say about the Turkish flora. With luck I might even be able to identify a few digital photos presently labelled simply 'a Turkish plant'.

January 12th is the date for our AGM. That will be disposed of briskly to leave time for our annual Photo Competition (see below for details) and, as last year, a (belatedly) Festive Social Evening.

When I took over as arranger of the talks programme from Brian (for want of a volunteer to do that vital job Grrrrr!!!) our February speaker was pencilled in as Susan Band talking on 'something about bulbs'. In reply to a query as to the exact title of her talk she e-mailed back 'That sounds good. Make it 'Some Things About Bulbs''. Now there are LOTS of things about bulbs and Susan, being proprietor of a

largely bulb nursery at Pitcairngreen by Perth, is more likely than most to know a great deal if not all of them. She can therefore be relied upon to come up with an anthology of things about bulbs which will both enlighten and entertain.

Graeme Butler is another nurseryman; running his nursery out of Rumbling Bridge. He has been invited as our 'species speaker' and he is to talk to us in March about primulas not just the species proper as it happens but their hybrids too and from the point of view of their cultivation. Now everyone likes (many love) primulas so there is bound to be something of interest for all our members in Graeme's talk. Plants from the nursery will be on sale at this meeting.

The Coxes, Euan *grand-père*, Peter *père* and Kenneth *fils*, have been seeking out, growing, breeding and selling rhododendrons and azaleas over three generations at Glendoick Gardens by Perth. There is now established a specialist Nursery and, separately, a Garden Centre at Glendoick that are likely well-known to members. Kenneth will be coming to talk to the combined Ayr and SW Scotland Groups at Threave on **9th April**. His topic is 'The Riddle of the Tsangpo Gorges'. I must confess, although perhaps I shouldn't, that to me the Tsangpo Gorges are not merely a riddle but are shrouded in mystery and wrapped in an enigma. So at least one person in the audience will be looking for them to be 'un-riddled' if at all possible. No bets that they will relate interestingly to rhododendrons. Kenneth is co-author of the recently published *Garden Plants for Scotland* which seeks to help Scottish gardeners with choice of (not necessarily Scottish) plants for Scottish gardens. He will be selling copies of his book at the talk.

This meeting is joint with the Ayr Group which intends to travel *en masse* to the Stewartry on the day to take in some garden visits, a high tea at Threave before hearing Kenneth's talk. This is more or less a repeat of a previous visit and local members are likely invited to join the party on the day at least for high tea. More details about this nearer the time. In order to accommodate an early return journey the **meeting will start at 7.00 p.m. with doors open at 6.30 p.m.**

## **We'll meet again ... don't know where ...**

Threave Garden, largely in the person of Trevor Jones it must be said, has proved a most welcoming and obliging host to the Group from its very foundation. Thus it was with great regret and with some trepidation, it must be confessed, for our future at Threave that your Committee learned of Trevor's leaving. Indeed so uncertain did our future at Threave look especially with a likely long delay anticipated in appointing a successor to Trevor that attempts were made to locate possible alternative venues for our up-coming autumn/winter talks programme in case we had to vacate Threave at short notice. Happily that has not proved to be the case.

Mrs Shiela Innes has recently been appointed to the post in charge of Threave. Your Convenor and Brian Davidson met with her recently to discuss just how the Group stood for continuing at Threave as hereto. Although Mrs Innes is not a trained horticulturalist, which might have boded ill for us, she turned out to be knowledgeable about gardening including rock gardening and, best of all from our point of view she was entirely sympathetic to our Group's continuing to use Threave as our venue and essentially under the same arrangements as previously.

So despite our forebodings, matters have turned out well for us. Your Committee looks forward with confidence to the continuance of the good working relationship

between the Group and Threave Garden in general and Mrs Innes in particular. It also wishes to bid welcome to Mrs Innes on behalf of the membership and express the wish that her tenure at Threave will be beneficial to that institution and personally rewarding for herself.

**A sorry tale to tell** Thus far our programme of events over the spring and summer has been, to put it mildly, a disaster. Our Away Day to Logan to visit the Botanic Garden and Logan House Garden had to be cancelled for lack of interest; just eleven people applying for a place. Our garden visit to Mavis Paton's lovely garden at Barnhourie Mill in May attracted by coincidence just eleven participants. Those eleven, fair enough, passed a very enjoyable evening as was to be expected. The Committee would like to express its thanks publicly to Dr Paton for making her garden available and to apologise to her for the disappointingly low take up from the membership.

As for plant sales (about which more below), the one at Kirkcudbright was adversely affected by bad weather and the one at Threave advertised for 22nd June in the event turned out to be held a week earlier on the 15th. The hastily arranged, on again-off again substitute sale at the Kirkcudbright Festival of Gardening & Country Life was itself affected by the weather and also low public attendances. Weather is one thing your Convenor cannot influence but getting dates right is clearly his responsibility. In defence, the date for the Threave sale had been brought forward by a week from last year and (he likes to think at least that) he was not correctly informed of that fact. Utterly defeated by this unexpected and unwelcome set back, he essentially threw in the sponge and left it to other members to organise the Festival of Gardening stall. To the great credit of some, they did just that; with a satisfactory result reported on below. They are to be sincerely thanked (they know who they are) for their plucky determination to 'shift' some plants for the Group.

I had in mind at this stage to launch upon a rant about apparent apathy of the membership as a large contributory cause to the poor response to our organised joint outings—but can't be bothered. In truth that would be unfair. There are many distractions (not least gardening) over the summer which divert or prevent members from taking part in joint ventures. Furthermore low participation might be indicative of wrong (*i.e.*, unpopular) choices being made by the Committee. That said, it is perfectly clear that there is no point in the Committee organising events in which there is neither sufficient interest nor viable participation.

In short and to be blunt this is 'crunch time' for the Group to decide whether it really wishes to have Group events organised for the spring/summer when the talks programme is in recess. It would be very helpful to the Committee to have your definite view on this so that the problem can be resolved and a decision made about the 2009 events programme. There are two kinds of apathy; simple and compound. Simple apathy is when you don't care and compound is when you don't care that you don't care. I hope that any existing apathy is not compounded.

**Prize Photo competition** After the AGM in January 2009 there will be the usual photographic competition. Last year's one was hotly con-tested by a large number of members and we wish to see even more entries this year. Again there are to be two classes and the subjects of these are respectively

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|---------|-----------------------------------|
| Χλασσ 1 | Αν Ινδιϋιδυαλ Ροχκ Γαρδεν Πλαντ   |
| Χλασσ 2 | Ροχκ Γαρδεν Πλαντσ ιν Ασσοχιατιον |

so that there is plenty of scope for all photographers. 'Rock garden plant' is meant to include any plant which is usually associated with 'rock gardening'. The plants are not required to be rare or difficult to grow. A colourful well-composed photo showing some artistic skill will appeal no matter what the plant subject.

This is a *democratic* competition; the print in each class with the highest votes cast by the membership audience wins for its taker a small but worthwhile prize. Thus there are no pernickety professional judges to intimidate entrants.

The **rules** will be the same as ever.

- All photographs must be colour prints in standard 6" X 4" (15cm x 10cm) format.
- Digitally reproduced photographs are permitted provided that they have not been excessively digitally enhanced; by which is meant altered by techniques not available to amateur, non-digital photographers, for example, colour enhancement or 'air-brushing' and other editing *etc.*
- All entries must have been taken by the entrant; when and where does not matter.
- At most three photographs per entrant per class.
- Photographs should not have been previously entered in the Competition.
- Plant to be identified by visible labelling.
- Entrant not to be identifiable from the print; for example, prints not to be marked visibly with entrant's name *etc.* (For identification, they may be marked on the reverse.)

Simply bring your photographs along on the night; no need to pre-enter.

**Sign of the times** Since the inception of the Group, your Committee, guided by the example elsewhere of fiscal prudence in the control of inflation, has held the membership subscription rate fixed. Now that prudence has been thrown to the wind and inflation let rip, the Committee feels it only right that we should make our own positive contribution to the free for all. Accordingly it has decided that membership subscription rates should increase by two pounds to **£15.00 for two memberships at the same address** and **£10.00 for single membership**. This is a modest increase *over four years* of 15% on the one hand and 25% on the other which of course does not hold a candle to recent electricity and gas rate rises!

**Subscriptions**, at these rates by cash or **cheques** made **payable to SWSRGG**, are due on 1st October next but **can be paid** to the Secretary **at the October and November meetings**.

To be serious for just a moment this rise has been necessitated by a couple of considerations.

As remarked elsewhere the major source of income for the Group is from plant sales. Because of the relatively small membership, subscription fees contribute less to the income. That does not mean however that they should not pull their weight so to speak. To hold back increases, particularly in a time of inflation, means that when they must come they are proportionately more punitive and have adverse knock on effect for membership numbers. That is the way to a vicious circle (downward spiral?).

Through circumstance and geography Group speakers generally need to travel large distances to get to Threave. With the cost of travel increasing so prohibitively the Group will need to spend greatly more on reimbursing speakers' travel costs. That increase in expenditure will need to be covered in part by the increase in membership fees.

Your Committee sincerely hopes that the membership will hold up under these increases. It is not difficult to work out that per meeting this is a very reasonable price even now for an evening's entertainment, edification and good company; including refreshment.

**Who will buy my red red rhodies ... ?** Financially plant sales are the life blood of the Group. The Committee organises both private (intra Group) and public sales. Those which we organise publicly provide a source of 'independent funding', *i.e.*, they do not put extra burden on the pockets of the members. To that extent they are most important. This year for example public plant sales produced combined income of nearly £600.00.

It is axiomatic that you can't sell plants you don't have and that plants don't sell themselves.

The source of plants is twofold. Members are asked to donate plants for sale from garden stock which they have surplus to their own needs. Now this has not been an abundant or reliable source of plants for sale both publicly and especially privately at our talks. (Nursery plants sold at our talks do not provide any income directly for the Group although they might help to defray the cost of the speaker.) Indeed there is only a handful of more or less consistent suppliers (aye the same!). It is reasonable to assume that most members have gardens and in which they propagate plants from time to time. There is thus no good reason why an adequate supply of 'surplus' or specially propagated plants should not be forthcoming from the wider membership to appear on our sales benches; particularly at talks in the spring. This is an appeal from your Committee for the general membership to make an effort to keep up the supply of plants for our various sales. We are prepared to sell whatever saleable plants you might have available. They need be neither rare nor exotic nor strictly alpine nor in large numbers. Furthermore we are prepared to sell plants on a 50/50 basis wherein half the sale price is remitted to the donor. Please do make a special effort to donate some plants for sale this coming session.

In addition the Committee has been in the habit of buying in some plants for re-sale. These tend to be miniature and choice rhododendrons and daphnes. This latter necessitates someone (and that someone is till now Cathie Tennant to whom many thanks) potting them on and tending to their welfare and storage meantime. We usually combine our public plant sales with a small display which is designed to

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advertise the Group and tout for new members. Thus there is need for manpower (it

is intended here that the male should embrace the female!) to set up, take down and man the sales/display stalls. Till now this is a chore that has rather heavily and unfairly fallen on the shoulders of the Committee members; granted with a few notable and praiseworthy exceptions (aye the same!). The Committee hopes that more of the ordinary members see this as a self-interested way they can contribute helpfully to the finances of the group and that they thus come forward with offers of help.

**Management Committee** The present Management Committee members are as follows.

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**Correction** In issue 8 of *Rock Gardening*, Gerhard Pils, author of *Flowers of Turkey A Photo Guide*, was erroneously described as being German. For the record he is in fact Austrian.