

Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter May 2010

Next Meeting

Saturday, June 5 at 10:30 AM

Garden Visit and Lecture:

Robin Magowan & Juliet Yli-Matilla

Location: 24 Taconic Road, Salisbury, CT



Show & Tell

Digital Presentation –Robin promises to give us a detailed account of the building of his fabulous garden while we view Juliet's photographs of the construction.

Plant Sale & Auction

Rock Gardening Masters like Zdenek Zvolonek and Josef Halda have contributed to this unique and beautiful stage, worked for peak performance from rock garden plants. The limestone is native to this region and is a display in its own right.

Some beverages will be provided, but you should bring your own lunch, along with some crusty bread and good cheddar!

Chairman's Message:

After joining the (North) American Rock Garden Society in 1974, one of the first members I was introduced to was Ev Whittemore who, at that time, lived in Westfield, MA. Ev was very generous. Among the plants she bestowed upon me was *Shortia galacifolia*, a.k.a. Oconee Bells. I had two



Shortia galacifolia – photo by John Lonsdale

rooted plants of the same clone. One I planted under high shade and the other in sun. Both plants survive today. The sun plant, compared to the shade plant, is tight growing with smaller, pale green leaves with red overtones, and is much more floriferous. The shade plant spreads more vigorously and the mature leaves are a glossy, deep green. The original shade plant is maintained at about 20 ft² and I have established a number of sub-colonies in my woodland garden from this plant. These are vegetatively produced by removing runners with roots from the periphery of the patch, planting them directly in the desired site and keeping them watered until established. Two patches, each maintained at about 5 ft², grow on the edge of a shaded, moist moss garden and it is here that numerous self-sown seedlings appear in the moss. This is the source of the seedlings I have brought to our

chapter's plant sales. In the environs of the patches where fallen tree leaves are allowed to remain, no seedling has ever appeared. I conclude that *Shortia galacifolia* has no problem with self-pollination, and that seed germination and seedling growth require the microenvironment of moist moss and no leaf cover or competition from other plants. I have never tried germinating the seeds in pots!



Typical Habitat of *Shortia galacifolia*

http://www.goldendelighthoney.com/tes/SHGA/shga_text.html

Four years ago in July, Elliott Jessen and I visited Dick and Anita Figlar in Pickens, SC. Dick is a recognized authority on systematics and taxonomy of Magnoliaceae, and his garden is a collection of *Magnolia* species ranging from hardy to semitropical (and even a few palms). During our stay, Dick took us to visit a *Shortia* colony in the Devil's Fork State Park in the Lake Jocassee watershed, Oconee County, SC. Oconee is the name of the Cherokee Indian tribe once endemic to this area. A trail from the park headquarters parking lot leads to a heavily shaded stream and here the Oconee Bells run as a nearly continuous green ribbon along both sides of the stream. The banks of this flat-bottomed stream are steep and moss encrusted where not covered by the *Shortia*. The green ribbon varied from 2 to 10 feet in width. Seedlings were observed growing in the moss.

Shortia galacifolia (Diapensiaceae) was first collected by the French botanist Andre Michaux (1746-1802) in 1788 in the Appalachian mountains of "Carolina." Michaux spent 11 years collecting in the US and had his base of operation out of Charleston, SC. His pressed

specimen of *Shortia* (in fruit, not in flower) was preserved in Michaux's herbarium in Paris. Michaux neither named nor described the plant but did note on the herbarium sheet that he collected it in "the high mountains of Carolina." Asa Gray (1810-1888), the Harvard University botanist, noticed this specimen when he visited Michaux's herbarium in April 1839. Upon Gray's return to the US, he searched in vain in the Carolina Appalachians for live plants. He and John Torrey published the taxonomic description in 1841 based only on Michaux's specimen. The genus was named for Charles Wilkins Short (1794-1863), a botanist with whom Gray had voluminous correspondence. Short never saw a plant of his namesake either dead or alive. The specific epithet *galacifolia* indicates the plant's foliar similarity to *Galax aphylla* Linnaeus, 1753. Gray later wrote in his journal: "Year after year I have hunted for that plant! And I grew sorrowful having named after Dr. Short a plant nobody could find." The plant was rediscovered in May 1877 by 17 year old George M. Hyams (1861-1932) along the Catawba River near Marion, McDowell County, NC. This station of only 50-100 plants covered an area of only 10 ft by 30 ft. Gray, accompanied by Charles Sprague Sargent, William Canby and J. H. Redfield, visited the site in 1879 at a time when the plants were not in bloom. Gray doubted it was Michaux's lost colony because its locus was not in "the high mountains." He eventually gave up his search. George Hyams' father, M. E. Hyams (1819-1891), was an herbalist and, apparently, the Hyams family collected this population to extinction.

Charles Sprague Sargent (1841-1927), Harvard University botanist and first director of the Arnold Arboretum, took up the hunt for Michaux's *Shortia* site in 1886. Sargent studied Michaux's journal and found very specific directions to the collection site near the headwater of the Keowee River at the confluence of the Horsepasture and Toxaway rivers. This site was inundated under Duke Power Company's Lake Jocassee in 1973. This deep lake (350 ft greatest depth) flooded 60% of *Shortia* habitat and remaining populations are fragmented. The lake level is 1,100 ft above sea

level. Michaux wrote in his journal 8 Dec. 1788: "I gathered a new low woody plant with saw-toothed leaves creeping on the mountain a short distance from the river." Three days later he "came back to the camp with my guide at the



From Mary Vaux Walcott's *North American Wildflowers*, published in 1925 by the Smithsonian Institution. Print is available for purchase at: <http://www.studiobotanika.com/>

head of the Keowee and gathered a large quantity of the low woody plants with the saw-toothed leaves that I had found the day I arrived. I did not see it on any other mountain. The Indians [Oconee Cherokee] of the place told me that the leaves had a good taste when chewed and the odor was agreeable when they were crushed, which I found to be the case." He continues by giving specific directions from the river to the plant colony. Sargent found Michaux's site in September 1886 and sent Gray a live plant. Think of the *tsuris* Gray could have avoided if he had realized the connection between the plant with "saw-toothed leaves" and *Shortia*. Also, Michaux's collection site is not in "the high mountains of Carolina" as noted his herbarium voucher. *Shortia* occurs at altitudes between 700 and 2200 ft.

A retranslation and reinterpretation of Michaux's journal in 1983 finds that he crossed *Shortia* territory twice in 1788, first in June and again in December. It is argued that because Michaux's herbarium-mount in Paris is of a plant in fruit that it was collected in June, not in December. Michaux was in the natural range of *Shortia* on 13 June, and out of the range on 12 and 14 June. Given a June collection date, the first collection site is considered to be near the confluence of the Whitewater and Keowee rivers (also, under the waters of Lake Jocassee). "Jocassee," the name of a legendary Cherokee maiden, means "Place of the Lost One." Her legend has nothing to do with Oconee Bells, however.

Of Interest: J. H. Redfield wrote an account of the Gray party's 1879 visit to Marion, NC to view live *Shortia*. JH's account includes a description of M. E. Hyams' work place. "A visit to the root and herb warehouse belonging to Wallace Brothers and under the charge of Mr Hyams, furnished evidence that this branch of industry has reached an extent and importance of which few are aware. The printed catalogue of indigenous plants, dealt by this house, enumerates about 630 species.... These simples find a large market, both in this country and in Europe, and the orders come mainly from wholesale druggists and the manufacturers of patent medicines. Think of a single order for fifteen tons of *Hepatica triloba!*"

Cliff Desch

Alpines in Greenland

Text and photographs by Todd Boland,
Newfoundland Chapter NARGS

Very few people ever get the chance to visit Greenland. I was fortunate to be invited along as a naturalist on an expedition cruise from Greenland to Newfoundland during August of 2004. I really didn't know what to expect, other than ice and snow, however, I was pleasantly surprised. Greenland was indeed green...at least along the coast!



Ice Fjord Illulisat

The areas I visited were all located on the western side of Greenland. We flew into Kangerlussuaq, cruised along one of the world's longest fjords then proceeded north to Illulisat, then south to Sisimiut and finally Nuuk, the capital of Greenland. Everywhere we landed, I was amazed at the diversity of plant life. I was even more amazed at some of the flower gardens I saw in Sisimiut and Nuuk!



Eriophorum scheuchzeri

The vegetation along Greenland's coast is Arctic tundra. While birch and mountain-ash do exist as 4-6 m trees in southern Greenland, the tallest woody plants of the western region were willows which reached up to 2 m in height. On the more exposed hillsides, these willows were completely prostrate. I saw at least 5 different species of willow. Dwarf birch (*Betula nana*) was also among the more common deciduous woody plants. The vast majority of woodies were evergreen. The advantage of these

evergreen plants is that they can start growth as soon as the temperatures rise above freezing. Ericaceous plants dominate; arctic cassiope (*Cassiope tetragona*), purple mountain heather (*Phyllodoce caerulea*), crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*), alpine bilberry (*Vaccinium uliginosum*), lingonberry (*Vaccinium vitis-idaea*), Labrador-tea (*Rhododendron palustre*), lapland rosebay (*Rhododendron lapponicum*), alpine bearberry (*Arctous alpina*) and bog rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*) were among these. Wet depressions were a sea of cottongrasses (*Eriophorum*) whose bunnytail seedheads swayed in the gentlest of breezes.



Epilobium latifolium

Rocky outcrops were home to a vast array of arctic-alpine plants that would make any rock garden enthusiast drool (more than once I had to wipe the corners of my mouth!). I was surprised by how many of these herbaceous plants I recognized from northern areas of my own province of Newfoundland. As it happens, northern Newfoundland has the southernmost distribution of many arctic-affinity species. Saxifrages were by far the most common: *S. oppositifolia*, *S. aizoides*, *S. hirculus*, *S. nivalis*, *S. paniculata*, *S. rivularis*, *S. cernua*, *S. tricuspidata*, *S. caespitosa* and *S. flagellaris*. As garden plants, I have only been successful with cultivating *S. paniculata* and *S. caespitosa*; the others seem to need cooler summer temperatures than I can supply.

Some of the other showier natives included riverbeauty (*Epilobium latifolium*), arctic poppy (*Papaver radicum*), alpine catchfly (*Lychnis*

alpina), moss campion (*Silene acaulis*), alpine chickweed (*Cerastium alpinum*), few-flowered anemone (*Anemone parviflora*), white mountain avens (*Dryas integrifolia*), Greenland primrose (*Primula egaliksensis*), alpine cinquefoil (*Potentilla neumanniana*), arctic plumboy (*Rubus acaulis*), rockcress (*Arabis alpina*), harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia* - it seems to grow everywhere in the Northern hemisphere!) and various *Draba*. All this diversity makes for intense color in the Greenland landscape during their short growing season, which runs from mid-June to early September. Of course, 24 hours of daylight throughout most of this period makes for nearly 6 months of growing during the 3 month period! Mind you, a summer day is only about 8-14 C and snow can fall at anytime during the summer months. I was fortunate to experience a freak day that reached 21 C (70 F)...it set a record!



Papaver radicum

While I was touring around the communities of Sisimuit and Nuuk, in southwestern Greenland, I was amazed to see honest to goodness flower gardens! I never expected to see ornamental gardens so far north. Once I did more reading on their climate, I was amazed to discover that the mean winter temperature is a mild -8 C (18 F) with the record cold being -26 C (-16 F)...that makes them the equivalent to hardiness zone 5! However, it is the degree days that make the difference. Even zones 2-3 in North America, which may have colder winters than western Greenland, are quite warm, if not hot in summer. There are plenty of degree days to allow for trees to grow. Greenland, however, has very few degree days. The average summer

temperature of western Greenland is only about 6 C (42 F), although scattered days may reach into the high teens (60's). Sisimuit and Nuuk's tallest plants are Arctic-affinity willows which may reach 1-2 meters.



Campanula rotundifolia

The importance of using natives as garden flowers was not lost on Greenlanders. Several of the flowers I saw were indeed natives, and rightly so. The floral display of riverbeauty (*Epilobium latifolia*), Arctic poppy (*Papaver radicum*) or harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*) is every bit as attractive as many of our exotic ornamentals (I also grow native harebell in my own garden).

Meanwhile, Greenland gardeners also use exotic plants. Perhaps the most popular is a plant from their neighbor Iceland; the common Iceland poppy, *Papaver nudicaule*. These are so prolific, that they actually grow as garden escapes along roadsides in those communities. With their cool temperatures, the Iceland poppies bloom continuously from late June through to early September. Most of the ornamentals I saw were spring-bloomers in most temperate gardens. Globeflower (*Trollius europeus*), leopard's-bane (*Doronicum orientale*), orange avens (*Geum X bourisii*), columbine (*Aquilegia vulgaris*) and polyanthus primroses were in full glorious bloom in August! I was even surprised to see a couple of taller perennials such as fireweed (*Epilobium*

angustifolium), monkshood (*Aconitum napellus*) and angelica (*Angelica archangelica*). Angelica, lady's-mantle (*Alchemilla alpina* and *A. minor*) and Iceland poppies (*Papaver nudicaule*) were among the most common flowers in the cemeteries. The most prolific garden >weeds= were buttercup and dandelion, very reminiscent of home!

Even a few annuals were utilized in gardens. Foremost among these were pansies, violas, alyssum, stock, cornflower and calendula. Us southern gardeners will recognized that these annuals are among the toughest and cold hardy so again, it should not be too surprising that Greenland gardeners would take advantage of these. No doubt, these annuals were started earlier in a nursery then planted out when about to bloom. I even saw a few pots of geraniums (*Pelargonium*) on sheltered patios.



Vegetable gardens also existed. Obviously, cool-season crops dominated; lettuce, cabbage and radish in particular. One brave farmer was trying to grow potatoes. These were growing out of a large cold frame. He would start the tubers under glass in these frames (24 hours of light means they stayed warm at all times). Once the plants reached the glass, he removed the lids and let them continue their upward growth. He claimed this method worked like a charm. Makes sense to me!

This is but a sampling of the wonderful diversity of plants that exist in Greenland, both native and exotic. Readers hailing from or having visited northern regions of Alaska, Canada or

Scandinavia will recognize many of the plants as these regions have similar climates and flora. I consider myself very fortunate to have had the opportunity to visit this remote and starkly beautiful corner of the world. It was a trip of a lifetime. To see images of my trip, be sure to visit the NARGS forum <http://nargs.org/smf/> and scroll down the page to the *Miscellaneous* section and *Alpine Travels*. I also invite you to participate in the NARGS forum, sharing your own alpine travels, plants you are growing or simply say 'Hello'! It's a great way to meet your fellow alpine enthusiasts.



BERKSHIRE BOTANICAL GARDEN

The World of Peonies

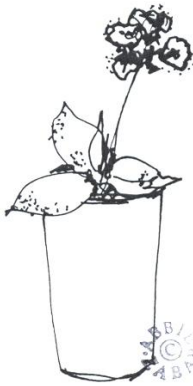
Saturday, June 12, 10 am - noon
Members \$18; Non-members \$24
Lecture, All levels, Registration required



In the last decade there has been a resurgent interest in the genus *Paeonia* a wonderful group of garden plants. Along with an in-depth look at tree and herbaceous peonies learn about the new intersectional group which crosses tree and herbaceous peonies. This talk will focus on siting, planting, and successfully cultivating these lovely and historical garden plants. Instructor **Kasha Furman** is owner of Cricket Hill Farm a specialty nursery located in Litchfield County CT.

~ STONECROP ALPINE PLANT SALE,
2010 ~

{Written & Illustrated by Abbie Zabar, © 2010}



The sky was blue, there was a breeze, and even with a rising temperature the mercury was nowhere near that eighty-eight degrees everyone remembered – with a sigh – from last year. You couldn't ask for a more perfect day or setting.

Saturday, April 24th was the 4th ANNUAL

STONECROP ALPINE SALE, a burgeoning rite of spring and the only reason for any gardener with a growing 'punch list' to abandon their own back yard on a gorgeous weekend in the momentary hiatus when ephemerals have been overtaken but fiddleheads are still unfurling and tulips continue to bloom, yet there's so much to see and do because nature's moving faster than at any other time of year.

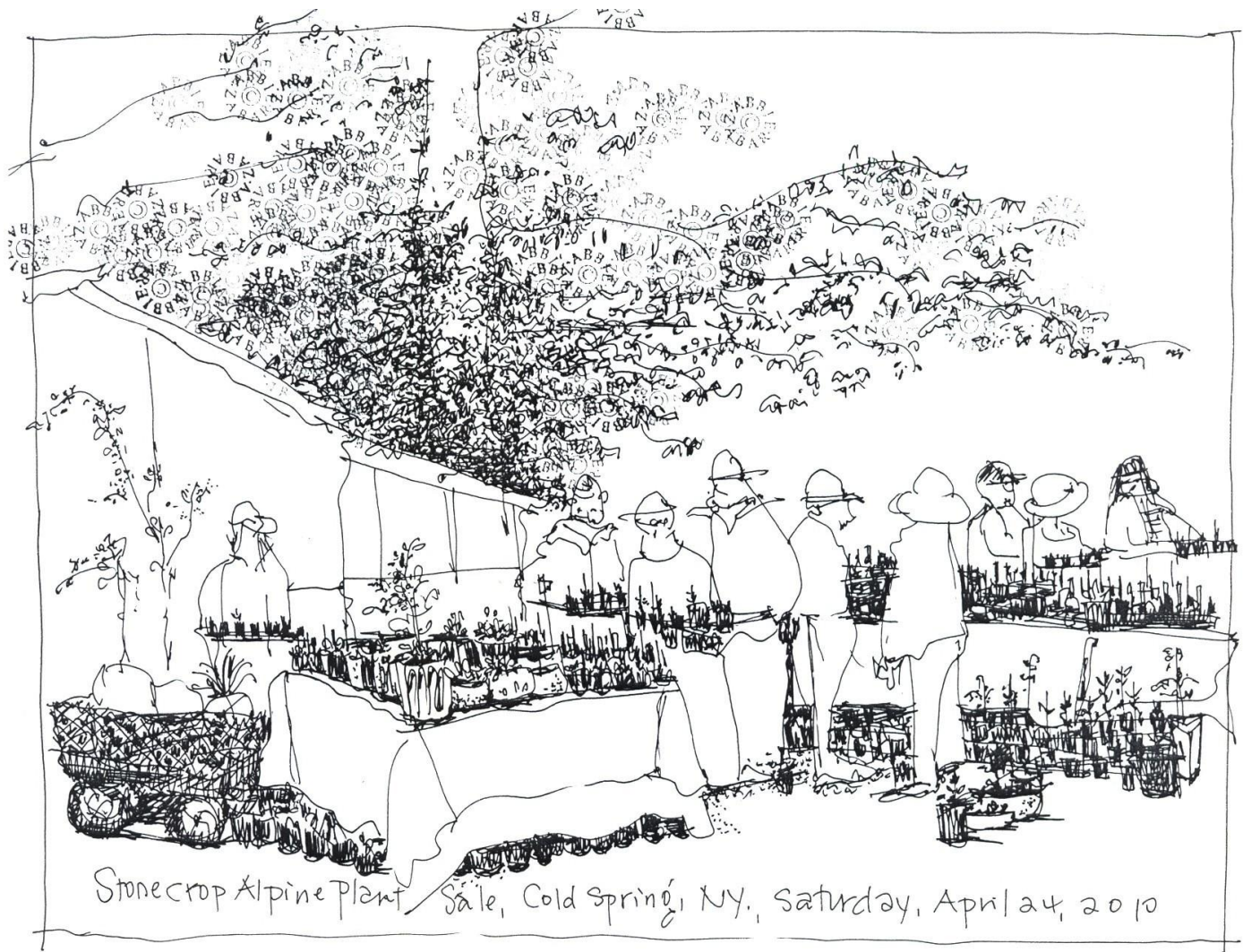
Suspecting we're too early, I detour with Pat and Jim – enthusiastic newcomers in the world of alpinists – to Cold Spring for coffee and hamantaschen, more famous for bric-a-brac emporiums. But not one of the shops lining Main Street with its iconic river view was open; unlike gardeners, the antiques crowd sleeps in on weekends.

When we return to Stonecrop – ready for bear – serious shoppers are hauling booty back to their cars while other flats of plants, all loaded with itsy-bitsy treasures – and previously spoken for – are in a holding pattern behind the vendor's tables, where one might think these are unsold goodies meant to be brought out for latecomers. Think again. It was only 9:50 AM and though the sale was scheduled from ten to five this tribe was working faster than Mother Nature in early spring.

Tables from DARRELL PROBST'S, GARDEN VISIONS, in Massachusetts are covered end-to-end with *Epimedium* species and cultivars. It could be the floor in a woodland forest, at hip height. Spider-like flowers dance above delicate looking – but robust – heart-shaped leaves on wiry stems. Darrell has been a major player in bringing new species of epimedium into cultivation that he's discovered on plant hunts in China, Japan and South Korea, while his own hybridization program has yielded several new introductions. Appropriately, all this splendor is presented in the shade of a great big tree, where I was comfortably drawing and observing. My bench-mates looked equally content with gonzo homemade sandwiches for sale in one of the barns

For their brief moment in the sun DON DEMBOWSKI of Pelham, NY brought along pots of spring ephemerals and woodland wildflowers that he grows and propagates right in his own back yard. Things like *Podophyllum peltatum*, *Pulsatilla vulgaris*, *Anemonella thalictroides* and a favorite acquisition from last year that I see blooming beyond the computer screen as I write, *Androsace sarmentosa* 'Chumbyi.'

Since my roof garden will be destroyed this year – in the name of progress and NYC's Local Law 11 – I'm on a restricted diet. Still, greenish flowers with farina-dusted leaves continue to seduce me. Or maybe it was for old times sake that I allowed myself just one plant from this year's Stonecrop Alpine Sale - *Primula auricula* 'Silverway.' "A masterpiece dusted with frost," to quote the label from WRIGHTMAN ALPINES, Ontario, Canada. I have no plans to grow this show-stopping little number with silver-grey edged flowers on a rocky limestone site, but rather in a humble terra cotta vessel – same way 'florist flowers' were featured in the 17th century when potted-up auriculas were all the rage. In later centuries, those with the means and the important estates created 'Auricula Theatres,' (talk about architectural charm!), rows of open shelving housed in customized enclosures where potted-up auriculas were staged for best effect, as well as shaded from direct sun and rain that could mar farina dusted



leaves. Yet appreciation of these beauties crossed all socio-economic lines during the British Industrial Revolution. Blokes who lived and worked in mill towns displayed equally fine prize-winning potted auriculas down at the local pub. Everyone was in on the act once it was discovered that these endearing ‘lookers’ stood up to the onslaught of sooty, acrid conditions better than most plants in the new northern factory towns. If that doesn’t give me hope – after all the demolition and debris has settled – what will?

While still circling the Wrightman tables, I was also tempted by the smallest frosty blue grey leaves of *Mertensia asiatica*. Lori Chips was equally smitten. With a caveat, I handed the little grower’s pot over to her because she’s planning on propagating it for Oliver Nurseries and I told her I’ll be looking for it when I’m back in the garden again.

POPE’S POTS of Auburn, Massachusetts offer some of my favorite hypertufa containers. I’m praising the distinguishing characteristics of Debra Pope’s work to friend and fellow gardener, Amy, whom I suspect would rather be planting her new passion, ‘heirloom aubergine’ seeds at this moment, but was right in there anyway cherry picking all those worthies with the capacious size and shape of New Year’s Eve punch bowls, each with a basket-weaving design or fluted motif encircling their form. This year, no longer in need of plants – or containers for that matter – I’m hugging a large lion’s head that Debra did in hypertufa but reminds me of a formidable mask the Romans might have carved from Carrara marble. It’ll be perfect on my exterior stucco walls that are scored to look like blocks of limestone because everything in my garden seems to be impersonating another material.

Shopping completed, it was time for a walkabout through the STONECROP GARDENS, visiting with old friends, not least of all Cholmondeley, “Head of Rodent Control,” as his doghouse plaque explains. Then over to the Alpine House where I check on other friends as I pat some memorable buns on the left just upon entering, making sure that *Draba longisiliqua*, *Draba mollissima* and a very choice ancient plant of *Gypsophila aretioides* ‘Caucasica,’ and one of *Gypsophila aretioides* are as inviting as ever to the touch. A pure white charmer, *Clematis x cartmanii* ‘Little Joe,’ is in flower and the great big tufa rock in the middle remains the supreme growing architectural statement of all time.

The Potting Shed, where I’d be very happy to camp out while my demolition is going on, has tool placements outlined on the wall, reminding me of Julia Child’s kitchen and “*Just like at Rosemary’s*,” says Caroline Burgess. She should know because Caroline worked at Barnsley House while still a student at Kew, ultimately becoming Head Gardener for Rosemary Verey. Caroline, now the Director of Stonecrop, is an expert plantswoman and very generous with her information and insights. I should know, because every time we meet up again I think of us working the Philadelphia Flower Show together as judges.

By now, Amy and I are standing on the manmade Rock Ledge admiring my favorite footbridge over water, an elongated, flat marquise stone with two baguettes on the side; no diamond solitaire had ever had a better setting. The majestic backdrop is a grove of Dawn Redwoods, (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*), that were originally planted in 1986 and – hard to believe – stood just five feet tall.

In addition to the plants, this sale was a time to meet up with garden friends that you don’t see often, and as Lori says in her March, 2010 story for the Berkshire Chapter Newsletter, “*The knowledge and camaraderie are unmatched ... these friendships are blessings worth*



celebrating.” And, too, the glorious day that Saturday was.

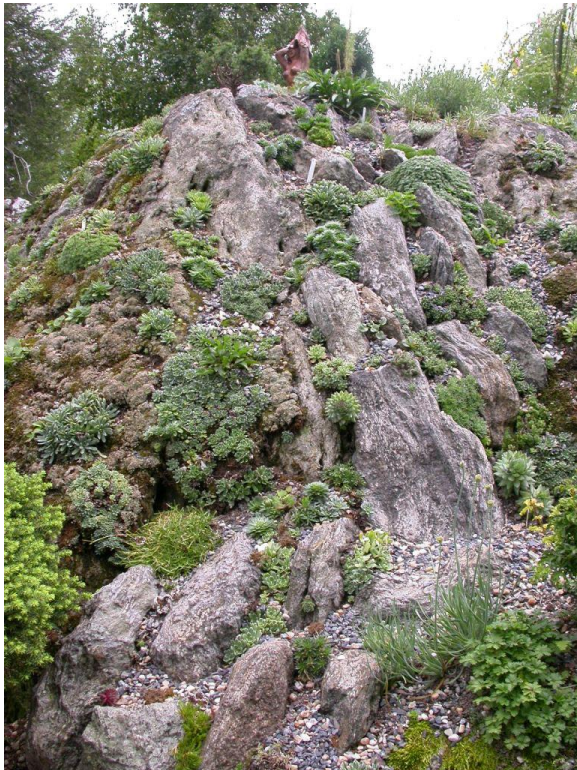
(I first heard Abbie’s ‘Voice’ in her own words. As she spoke at the 2006 Eastern Winter Study Weekend in Manhattan, I could tell that she had a slant on things unlike anybody else. So we at OLIVER NURSERIES are happy that Abbie has written a piece for our online newsletter. If you are lucky enough to be familiar with her work then you already know how engaging her writing is. When I flip or scroll to any article of hers, I settle into place for a few moments that will be enjoyable. Plus I almost always learn something. Whether it is the history of NYC’s water towers, to a jewel of a birthday memoir about a famous rock gardener, to a recipe for sugared sempervivum flowers, I can always count on Abbie to deliver a fresh take on the world, a way of looking at things I hadn’t considered before. And that, I think, is one of the most satisfying reasons to read anything. To subscribe to the Oliver Nurseries Newsletter go to <www.olivernurseries.com> and to read Abbie’s piece, ‘An Ode to Sempervivum,’ in the upcoming July /August issue click on ‘Nursery News.’ ~ LORI CHIPS, Alpine Manager at Oliver Nurseries, Fairfield, CT. and BNARGS Chapter Member.)

Editor’s Notes: This article first appeared in the May/June edition of ‘The Urban Gardener,’ the newsletter of the Manhattan Chapter of NARGS.

The Phoenix Garden

Text by Robin Magowan and photographs by Juliet Yli-Matilla

We all call ourselves rock gardeners, but not everyone would take the term so literally as to devote himself to little but the rock tops themselves. The focal point of my early garden was a small outcrop of decaying granite, six feet high and some thirty feet wide, that lay a few steps from my writing studio. On its north-facing side I found I could plaster saxifrages, taking the plant in the sand it came with and smearing it where a thin carpet of



Robin's Crevice Garden circa 2009

moss and lichen offered a toehold. The saxifrages would eventually seed themselves across the rock face, often in quite bare places. So I was, with the help of the plants, already a rock top gardener.

But my outcrop by no means provided a unified focal point for a garden of diverse plants. Obstructing it were two trenches that the roots of a pair of ash trees had creviced in the outcrop. During his visit, after the 2008 winter study

weekend that our chapter hosted, Zdenek Zvolanek suggested that I make the outcrop the basis for a redesigned crevice garden. All I needed to do was fill in the two crevices by laying the stones vertically and there I was with the basis for a revitalized garden.

A year earlier, at the first Czech international rock garden conference, Josef Halda had offered to build me a garden at the first opportunity. I had in mind something more dramatic than the two small berms filled with meadow plants outside our house's front entrance. But when Josef showed us a beautiful garden he had made with large, gently sloping black rocks in a farmer's back yard, a few miles from where he lives in northeastern Bohemia near the Polish border, we decided that a garden with large rocks might be too overpowering for the house entrance.

While awaiting Josef's arrival, delayed for a year by visa problems, I happened to meet a local mason, Leon Harris, who had access to an unexcavated part of the Conklin quarry in Falls Village, CT. The rocks he showed me were strikingly fissured white dolomite, old enough to be turning into marble. Some were lined with fossils. They were slated to be ground into road gravel for which there was a consistent demand. I could see the ornamental possibilities offered by gray and white rocks so beautiful they could stand on the lawn as sculpture, and I bought a truckload, setting two big chunks to the east of the outcrop (unaligned, alas, as Halda would point out—but by then so festooned with plants they could not be resited).

I expected to be able to paste saxifrages and androsace on them in much the same fashion as I had done with the outcrop. But an outcrop is an extension of ledge deeply buried in earth, whereas a newly quarried rock, however submerged in soil, lacks the requisite moistness, one that rain, or the gardener, hose in hand, has to supply. But for all the difficulty, or maybe because of it, I found the challenges enthralling. These were rocks that, like a trough, could accommodate the tiniest gems; only here, clinging in a fissure, they looked as if they actually belonged. Taking Zdenek's advice, I

procured from a pottery a pail of sticky bottom clay, much like the substance from which children make sculptures, with which I filled in the gaping fissures. Then, wrapping the geophyte in a dressing of moss, I inserted it in the clay cavity. A year later, *Clintonia megarhiza* and *Petrophytum caespitosum* are two well-established citizens.

In early May, 2009, I picked up Halda as he neared the end of his NARGS-sponsored tour. I had no idea if he still wanted to build me a garden, let alone what he might want to take on in the five working days we had. But I did point out a small area to the south of the outcrop that had defeated every effort of mine, larded with small boulders and too sun-baked for weeding enjoyment. I must have mentioned that the soil adjoining the outcrop seemed quite deep. That evoked Josef's architectural curiosity and he spent much of the next day with a spade, digging out a long uptilting wing of ledge, and then a second parallel stratum, some three further feet below. The two sweeps of ledge would suggest the striated lines that the rest of the design would incorporate.

Up to this point my various rockeries had been limited by what could be transported in the bucket of a tractor. Using it, my caretaker, Swede Ahrstrom, and I had put together and planted a small limestone addition to the granite outcrop the previous autumn. That, Josef felt, he could accommodate, but to build a garden in scale with the outcrop he needed a machine capable of moving the much bigger boulders that he wanted for the cornerstones of his design, and workmen capable of lifting and setting them with the help of strong straps. We enlisted the help once again of Leon Harris, his two-man crew, and his heavy truck and backhoe. Josef and I spent much of the next morning in the cool heights over the Conklin quarry with the masons, tagging rocks that caught our eye and, with the backhoe, opening the wooded hillside buried underfoot. The plethora of choices was such that we could limit ourselves to rocks we found utterly irresistible: intensely



fissured; full of interesting seams and fossils. Many were substantial gardens in their own right, encased in flattering moss, lichen, desirable ferns, hepatica, aquilegia Canadensis, and other woodland specimens. While waiting for our tonnage to be delivered, Josef set me the task of ripping out the whole of the garden below the outcrop.

I am not against change, but I prefer to do it incrementally, a plant at a time. After almost twenty years I could not help but feel a certain attachment for what the plants and I had created between us. To rip out a whole seasonal intricacy of interwoven plants and submerged bulbs was not easy. Looking out at the devastation that evening, the uprooted thyme, penstemon, veronica, eriogonum, gypsophila, phlox, all smoldering on the adjacent lawn and the now pocked incline of naked earth, I couldn't help but lament. It didn't help to tell myself that this is the storied way in which the new has always come into being. Krishna the destroyer is merely another avatar of Krishna the creator; out of destruction, new life arises. For me, the five or so hours spent pulling it all apart was almost too much. Worn out and every limb aching after the intense work, I had no choice but to leave the plants pulled out in several piles on the lawn, waiting for my wife's gardeners to heel them into temporary homes in the vegetable garden. I didn't like to feel so exhausted and sad, seeing how quickly the years of tender devotion and care had vanished.

Among all the debris, a small number of plants were left standing: conifers, several daphne, a miniature rose, deep-rooted pulsatilla and acontholimon, and a couple of rock-covering clumps (*aubrietia* and *Astragalus angustifolius*) which were, like the proverbial banks, too big to fail. Josef saw them as structural points for his new rockery, while Leon Harris saw them as challenges to his ingenuity. Not all of them would survive an unusually rainy summer, let alone the winter. Daphne that had once bestrode

their little incline, watching the rain drain away before it could affect their fine network of roots, now found themselves inundated from the earth and rocks above.

Next day, the placing of rocks proceeded at a pace that left us all differently drained. Lift and lower, up and down, no soon was one great rock laid in place than Josef was called upon to select the next from a pile in a field several yards below my studio. Josef would confess that never in his life had he had to think so fast, so strenuously, about garden structure. Each rock, often enough more massive than the two masons waiting with gloved hands to grab hold of it and ease it out of its straps, had to be scrutinized,, turned, sited, and, often enough, re-sited, before it met Josef's approval. It was a subtle and exacting process and, even days later, with much of the garden in place, none of us could anticipate exactly how Josef would want a new rock angled, let alone how deeply buried—the design was that turbulent. As for myself, I was left awed by the pinpoint accuracy with which the masons maneuvered the great stones and their courage as they stood holding for a whole minute or two their knee-buckling load.

In most building schemes the bigger rocks, like the bigger plants, are set in the rear; we build up to them. Josef, instead, prefers to use them frontally, rising up in the forefront like one of those ranges on either side of the Owens Valley in California. Set smack against the lawn, they create the illusion of something utterly original: not a rock garden so much as a distinct mountain-scape. Much of Josef's life, from his teen-age days as a rock climber to his current work as a taxonomist, plant finder and seed gatherer, has taken place in the mountains, and it is that geologic reality he incorporates in his garden designs. Difficult, one might think, when the terrain is merely rolling, as much of mine is. But that's where big rocks mixed with



smaller ones in a tumult of striated lines can suggest a very different montane composition.

Once larger rocks entered the outcrop equation, then the garden in front of my studio, filled with a rich, moisture-retentive soil that accommodated gentians, several daphne, and even *Dicentra peregrina*, now looked out of kilter. This was a garden I could more

easily alter. Just keeping plants in scale, in such rich earth, required considerable attention which I could now direct to the four or five very large rocks with which Josef graced this perimeter.

After Josef's departure, my initial efforts went into making these insertions look as if they have always dwelled there. The process of domesticating them by surrounding them in earth can seem never-ending. There is always another bucket or two more of amended soil I can add, extending in the process the available planting area. Despite being filled in, the overhanging stone roofs still make excellent homes for a range of moisture-sensitive plants.

I treat each rock as a virtual trough, but one in which, unlike my exposed troughs, the plants command a sheltered site. If a plant is rumored to actually feed on the limestone, that's reason enough to acquire it. I'm told I can enlarge limestone cavities by boring away with a geologic hammer and chisel, but as yet I'm still too besieged by other types of garden work to attempt such surgery.

Barring use of the geologist's hammer, there are numerous sites waiting to be seized in my new rockscape -- the more recondite, probably the better. Delicious surprise, after all, is a rock's prime ingredient, the astonishment that a plant may thrive on the surface of the rock at all. I feel like a miner, or a master of the unlikely, armed with a skewer-like trowel, tapping away until I find a resonant cavity. It is here, too, that weeds, pioneers as they are, can indicate depths not so apparent. If all else fails, there are always

the succulents. Josef suggested *orostrachys*: each rosette, inserted in a weathered pore, can become a comic monstrosity. Given the slightest indentation, a mat of *sedum* can turn a glaring rock surface into a painting. Or a layer of *sedum* can create a planting space for tiny bushes growing on top of it: *lithodora*, *molckia*, *rhamnus*.

In filling out the rockscape, the plants I look for are ones that can carpet bare rock, especially those that contour themselves to the wavering rock face. For draping an edge, *arenaria* are especially valuable, as they divide readily, and can be suspended in a meager layer of soil atop a cliff face. So are plants such as *talinum* and, in the shade, *saxifrages* and *Androsace lactea*, which can grow on seemingly no soil at all, and which look good the steeper the incline.

In my efforts to populate rock surfaces, I have learned that nursery plants resent being tried here, there, and everywhere to see where they might do best. Their long thread-like roots prefer reasonably deep cavities in which to seat themselves. Such security, I feel, reassures them. They need time, too, to settle, but if they are planted in spring, it is often difficult for them to withstand summery desiccation. Rock surfaces shed moisture extremely well, which allows for good drainage, but may lead plants to burn up. Time for settling is often not so available in autumn, which is otherwise preferable for planting. How on a rock you withstand full sun is a question that needs to be put to a vast range of dryland species. If I can coax them through the first six weeks on the rocks, there is hope they may withstand the winter.

Six months later, at the Halloween end of October, I took the bull by the horns and expanded the two small berms in front of our house. I followed Josef's example: the same masons, the same limestone quarry, and this time even bigger rocks, but the effect is rather different. Instead of the perimeter stone being set confrontationally, the great blocks have been laid low along the driveway, where they flow, rippling, one into another. There are a few larger and, quite possibly, more ambitious stones than

Josef had access to, but they are set back toward the house. This entrance garden has a completely different feeling than the garden below the outcrop, which is wild, tumultuous, and saved from chaos only by the architectural lines that come from the excavated wings of ledge. The garden in front of our house is serene and welcoming. I was surprised to find that the large white stones are not off-putting as far as the look of the house is concerned. Instead they make the vertical stories of the house, rising as they do right off the driveway, look less abrupt, and smaller. The rocks, strange things that they are, domesticate the house.

Set on the east side of the house, and protected thus from the afternoon sun, it makes for what I hope will be a rather different growing space



The New Garden, Spring 2010

than the sun-baked one Josef contrived below the outcrop. Whether I shall be able to grow the mist-haunted Arctic and Asiatic species that tempt me remains to be seen. Most of them would prefer a peaty, acidic soil. But the great rocks, by their very nature, can absorb a quantity of water without the plants being submerged. Fringed soldanellas that have long defied me look distinctly possible.

By now the masons and I knew what we were about. The fetching of stone from the quarry and the laying of it was very much a collaborative experience, shared with my wife's perennial

gardener, Michelle Stimpson, and the trio of masons. The process was very much like that of assembling a gigantic jigsaw puzzle. We nailed down the perimeter along the drive and looped back on both sides toward the house. Then, after much deliberation, we placed several enormous stones, unearthed from the hillside where the masons had been eyeing them for years. The subsequent filling in was less exacting. Rocks, no matter what their girth, could be tried out, provisionally. And occasionally we even moved them around—the process was that fluid. More often, all a rock needed was to be turned, sometimes in a very different direction, or buried up to the hilt, or raised a few inches.

We made a crevice garden, with the stones tightly angled against one another. But unlike the conventional Czech garden, with its rows of very narrow cavities, more suitable for seedlings than mature plants, we could afford to be generous with our rare cavities. What's wrong with big *pulsatillas*? Or a spring garden, deficient as yet in the way of rock-carpeting plants, but well laced with gorgeous fritillaries and bright low-lying species tulips?

It helped to be able to pile our truckloads of rock in the driveway, a few feet from the beginning of the construction. Once we could see the pieces, it was possible, after a while, to entertain a notion as to how they might be sited. Some, of course, defied us. We had one huge horror of a stone, the wrong shade of white, shaped like a shark, with no redeeming fissure anywhere, that made us all wonder how it had snuck into the lot. But at the very end of the process, with hardly a stone left to insert, we decided to celebrate the monstrosity by raising it on one end and treating it as a kind of sculpture, a comic cornerstone on the far end of the garden—a stone, flying up out of the ground in which it had been very deeply wedged.



Wild Things Rescue Nursery

Every Spring I wait for the start of the Saratoga Summer Farmers Market. Each year I find a new vendor that has something wonderful. One year it was the discovery of chocolate peanut butter from Saratoga Peanut Butter. Another year it was the discovery of Colebrook Country Wines and their delicious fruit/grape blends (green apple Riesling is my favorite). This year it is the discovery of Wild Things Rescue Nursery.



Trillium sessile – photo by Dawn Foglia

Imagine my delight to see such plants as *Epimedium rubrum*, Hepaticas, several species of Trillium and *Phlox divaricata*. These were not your standard Farmer's Market perennials. I was even happier when I discovered that most were priced at \$7 or \$8 a pot for a flowering sized plant, and that the next day was the annual plant swap.

For me it is a 35 minute drive to visit the nursery, which contains pretty display gardens and a good selection of great plants, or I can visit them at the Saratoga Farmers Market. They also participate in a couple of other Farmer's Markets in the area and sell plants mail order at <http://thosedarnsqurls.mswin.net/>. I am sure I will be visiting them again. I hope you do too.

Happy Gardening!

Erica Schumacher

Editor's Notes:

In Abbie Zabar's wonderful reprise of the Stonecrop Sale, she mentions 'hamantaschen.' These wonderful pastries are part of Jewish tradition, and are baked and eaten during Purim, a late winter festival celebrating Queen Esther



and her role in saving the Jews of Persia from extermination about 520 BC. In New York, and perhaps a few other large American cities, hamantaschen have become, like the bagel, a ubiquitous baked goodie, long removed from its ethnic origins. I imagine it's hard to find hamantaschen in Montana or Oregon or Kentucky, but in Cold Spring, NY they can be found as long as the bakery or coffee shop is open!

Abbie also mentions Garden Visions, the most excellent Epimedium specialty nursery in Hubbardston, MA. It was founded by Darrel Probst and his (now former) wife, Karen Perkins, but now it is run by Karen, albeit with Darrell's continuing involvement as a collector and hybridizer.

3 Nice and Easy Plants

This spring has been amazing, and I've spent a huge amount of time in the garden, weeding, culling and just generally looking at what I've accumulated over the years. Like everyone who gardens, I have favorites, and like everyone, I've got a few plants that are easy and seem to fit in pretty much anywhere in the garden. Among the group of plants that are nice without being special, and offer a touch of color (yellow!) without being intrusive, are several members of the genus *Alyssum*. Right now I've got *Alyssum moellendorffianum*, *A. daghestanicum* and *A. sibirnyi* blooming. The first one I grew from NARGS seed about 10 years ago, and it has spread around without being a thug, and is reliable and pretty. The latter 2 I grew from NARGS seed 2 years ago, and both are small, with the usual yellow flowers, and are both ideal juxtaposed against any somewhat larger plant



Alyssum moellendorffianum – photo by Peter George

with either blue or lavender flowers. So for those of you seeking small, easy and pretty plants with yellow flowers, any or all of these 3 would be ideal.

They are growing in gravelly soil, in part to full sun, and the *A. moellendorffianum* has even seeded itself into some tufa, where it remains a bit smaller but still quite pretty.

PFG

2010 BNARGS Programs

July 3

Trough Workshop: **John Spain**

Garden Visit: **Elisabeth & Rod Zander**

Please sign up via email or call for the trough workshop: canbya@gmail.com or phone 860.307.7345

August 14

AM: **Bill Brown**, *SpringBulbs of Turkey*

PM: Peter George, *Evolution of My Garden*

September 4

AM: **Barrie Porteous**, *Unusual and Underused Perennials*

PM – **The Big Plant Sale**

October 9

AM: Andy Brand, [Broken Arrow Nursery](#), *New Dwarf Conifers & Japanese Maples*

PM: Eric Breed (from Dutch Rock Garden Society), *Going Wild for Bulbs*

November 6 - Annual Lunch Sydney

Eddison, author of Gardening for a Lifetime: *How to Garden Wiser As You Grow Older*

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Vice-Chairperson – Robin Magowan
Secretary – Carol Hanby
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Greeter – **Still Open**
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Newsletter Editor – Peter F. George
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Proofreader – Martin Aisenberg
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Peter F. George, Editor
Berkshire Chapter NARGS
PO Box 833
Petersham, MA 01366