

Our Scottish weekend

For most of the Hardy Planters who were lucky enough to attend the 2012 Summer Weekend, Dunblane seemed a long way north, but for me it was 181 miles south! Little did I realise how lush the gardens would be there. Had I been blindfolded I'd have thought I was on the west coast. (On the dry east coast of Sutherland, battered by both east and west winds, my gardening is more about gravel and lavenders.) The Saturday was marked by high humidity and delightful scents. Overnight rain cooled Sunday, but didn't diminish my awe at what the gardeners had achieved.

Lasting memories?

- Rhododendrons of every hue, candelabra primulas and meconopsis to die for.
- The enthusiasm and hospitality of the owners made me feel privileged. There was so much to learn from their work.
- The beech hedges at Boreland House which were only 10 years old. I'm struggling to establish mine after 15 years.
- The "ponds" at Dowhill fed by waterways created to drain the hillside and all done by a man who claimed no engineering knowledge; the amphitheatre of its quarry garden.
- Hostas without slug damage and not only in the frog-filled garden.



© John Dyson

Boreland House

- John Mattingley’s inspirational lecture about his garden at Cluny. I hadn’t realised there were so many primulas.
- Having both a lecture by Billy Carruthers of Binny and his plant stall meant we could feast our eyes on his peonies and take some home. Who could ask for more?

Catriona Grigg, Sutherland

Braco Castle Gardens

It’s not the easiest place to find, but that is one of Braco Castle’s great attractions. If you want a bit of history, a peaceful setting and outstanding views, then those boxes are certainly ticked. Its 20 acres provide something for gardeners of almost every persuasion. If you like formality, Braco offers many herbaceous borders, lawns and pond, although the most ardent hardy planter looking for rare and unusual plants might be a little disappointed. If you prefer informality, the flower meadows, snowdrop woods, azalea and rhododendron walks, woodland and bulb fields will provide colour and enjoyment for many months of the year. If you are a tree buff, you might have to wait a few more years for the “infant” arboretum to mature, but watching its progress over time would be fascinating.

Many of the more desirable plants we saw at Braco are not generally suited to our own Mendip alkaline soil, but if we were to pick out a “lust-after” plant it would have

© Alastair Barr



Braco Castle Gardens

to be *Embothrium coccineum* (Chilean Fire Bush) with its brilliant red flowers. It is perhaps not the tidiest shrub in the world, with a tendency to spread rapidly and randomly and reach a height of 8m if not kept under control, but its vivid early-summer blossom certainly lights up a garden and its evergreen foliage provides year-round interest.

The other plant to catch our eye was *Viburnum plicatum* f. *tomentosum* ‘Mariesii’, not an unusual shrub, but the specimens at Braco must be towards the top end of the size range for the species and were really spectacular in full flower. Ours has a lot of growing to do...

Restoration and renovation of the garden is a long-term challenge for its Dutch owners, constrained (as most of us are) by time and money, although on a much greater scale in Braco’s case! How we’d love to see the Victorian greenhouse fully rebuilt and re-plumbed, but successfully getting the overall garden structure re-established and under control has understandably been the priority. Another visit in a few years to see how the garden has developed is a must.

Alastair and Jenny Barr, Somerset

The Steading

This is very much my sort of garden. There is space to appreciate everything: the artistry of colour-blending the herbaceous plants, shrubs and trees; the shape and simplicity of the beds, in many places keeping the underplanting to one species, such as Alan Bloom’s *Phlox subulata* ‘Oakington Blue Eyes’ round the pillars on the top lawn.

The springs which keep the ponds clear and the conical hill behind the house influence the design, with plenty of seats, some in a sunken circle surrounded by mossy stones and saxifrage. But it is the planting which delights: colour all summer long from the hardy perennials; *Sorbus* to provide spectacular autumn foliage; the wonderfully subtle hues of the rhododendrons; for



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The Steading

winter structure unusual trees including *Cunninghamia*, *Araucaria* and *Sciadopitys*, the Japanese Umbrella Pine; and self-sown aquilegias and comfrey giving an air of relaxation.

The large stones from the old steading and pieces of farm machinery link the old working farm to the present garden, but the work continues with a verdant vegetable garden and polytunnel, cleverly shaded and screened by shrubs.

Gill Payne, Essex

Dowhill

Dowhill is a hillside garden which has been evolving over three decades. The main drive is lined with fruiting cherry trees, but we were soon led off through a field of sheep to two artificial lakes stocked with trout and, though we were not lucky enough to have sightings, we learnt that otters, herons and ospreys regularly visit. A meandering stream, fed by one of the many ponds higher up the garden, has a series of falls designed for the trout to spawn.

The lakes are hidden from the road by a thick screen of interesting trees and shrubs including azaleas and rhododendrons, but not the dreaded *R. ponticum* which had been successfully removed.

Up the gentle slope alongside the stream we came to a more densely wooded area with mature native trees, some thought to be well over 200 years old. Emerging on to a level section of the garden, across the lawn we had our first view of the house which

© Sue Jackman



Dowhill



© Sue Jackman



© Sue Jackman

Embothrium coccineum, the Chilean Flame Bush

Dowhill primulas

dates from 1710. A newly planted flower bed had been created near the north-east corner of the house where a large sweet chestnut had blown down; but our attention was drawn to the fiery presence of *Embothrium coccineum*, blazing away in full flower. This Chilean Fire Bush was placed near the ha-ha separating the garden from the parkland beyond, the grass of the rising slope a perfect green background for the flame-coloured flowers. It was stunning!

A small pond was fenced off to provide protection for a mallard and her newly hatched ducklings. Other ponds were linked by a stream among flower beds. Stars of the show had to be the silky blue meconopsis and the lovely candelabra primulas, including *Primula pulverulenta* and *P.* 'Inverewe', in gorgeous shades of coral, peach, pink and magenta, weaving through an interesting range of moisture-loving plants.

In a delightful cobbled courtyard pretty alpines, including *Erinus alpinus*, the Fairy Foxglove or Starflower, grow in crevices of the old walls.

Beyond the house is a woodland walk uphill through mature trees to the ruins of Dowhill Castle, from where we had a splendid view across to Loch Leven.



© Pam Ratcliffe

Sally-Ann Turner, Essex *Paeonia lactiflora* 'Merry Mayshine'



Parkhead House

Parkhead House

We drove up through suburban Perth and drew to a halt at Parkhead House. Walking up the long, beech-lined drive in warm sunshine we anticipated the pleasure ahead, and the garden proved to be a gem. The fresh white, lodge-style house with its coned roofs (which seemed to be peculiar to the area) was framed by two large old beech trees, twisted and gnarled with time, which had fought to find position, travelling along the ground, now making a wonderful backdrop to the superb planting.

The garden was crammed full of exciting plants, often draping over the mossed stone edging: pink peonies, white meconopsis, candelabra primulas, treats that don't suit my Sussex heavy clay soil. To choose just three special plants is quite a challenge. I liked the striking single peony, *P. lactiflora* 'Merry Mayshine', with its upright habit, brilliant red petals surrounding a golden centre, and good scent. In semi-shade I found a delightful briar rose with fresh, rich-green feathery leaves and single pale mauve flowers with a clovery scent – an unnamed delight which was thriving in the garden when the current owners arrived some thirty years earlier. Of course I have to choose a meconopsis on a visit to Scotland, and the little *M. quintuplinervia* (contents page) with its nodding habit and silvery air-blue petals was a delight not to be missed.

Judith Hogg, Sussex

Branklyn Garden

Our first impression was of a garden full of colour, with lots of repeat plants obviously allowed to self-seed. The garden slopes away from the house, at times quite steeply, with lots of paths winding around, opening up new vistas. There were hardy orchids seeding every which way including into the stone troughs in front of the house. Other plants growing freely were the blue poppies (it's not fair!), primulas, aquilegias, hellebores, coreopsis, and of course rhododendrons, all looking happy and healthy. A sheet of the dogwood *Cornus canadensis* brightened a shady area, followed by some vigorous variegated hostas giving the same effect. Suddenly a small flock of long tailed tits flitted through the trees, adding to our enjoyment.



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Branklyn Gardens

Returning towards the house we found two scree beds, the smaller well established but the much bigger one below the house gave the impression it was a newer venture. Noted there was *Potentilla neumanniana* 'Nana', new to me but in the Plant Finder. Other plants we admired were *Lilium oxypetalum* var. *insigne* (purple bell and only 30cm tall), *Ranunculus gramineus*, *Roscoea*, *Geranium palmatum*, numerous *Potentilla* varieties and many more. The one we coveted most, however, was an orchid, *Calanthe* Kozu gx; what a beauty!

This was our last garden, and the star of all the gardens we visited. One thing for sure, we will be back to see more of Scotland.

Caryl Kennerley and Diana Williams, North Wales



Someone said "Plant Sales" and they all vanished...

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