

**'THE FLOWERS OF HIMACHAL PRADESH' -  
A TALK BY SUE JACKMAN, DECEMBER 2015**

*Karen Sparrow*

**L**ong-time member of the HPS and Chairman of the HPS Essex Group Committee, Sue Jackman, gave us an interesting account of her touring holiday in Himachal Pradesh, Northern India. The minibus tour was run by AGS/Greentours, with garden designer and naturalist Chris Gardner as leader, and went from Kullu, through the Jaloori Pass and over Rohtang La to the Lahaul valley. From there, using Keylong as a base, they went to Baralacha La, over the Kunzam La to the Spiti Valley, and via Sumdo to Sangla.

This tour took them over very rough roads, some of which were impassable at times, due to snow-melt running down them and making them unstable. Repairs were made by local labourers using large backhoes and bulldozers. Some of the roads had steep banks on one side and terrifying drops on the other! The road through the Lahaul valley follows the Chandra River and it was often very hard to tell them apart, as water cascaded down both.

From the very first day, when they were taken to an area of mixed forest, they saw a plethora of wonderful plants, beginning with the Himalayan Spruce, unusual for its whorled branches which hang down; frothy *Sorbaria tomentosa*; fragrant, rambling *Rosa brunonii*; orchids (including *Calanthe tricarinata*) growing among the rocks, and here they were to see the only *Cardiocrinum giganteum* on the tour. People living in this area on the far side of steep valleys have their provisions and post delivered via baskets on lines stretched across the valleys.



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*Cardiocrinum giganteum*



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*Roscoa alpina*

The Jaloori Pass, at 3,000 metres, revealed cobra lilies, pretty *Aquilegia pubiflora* and on the hillside, growing at 45°, *Iris milesii*, with its lovely lavender and pink flowers and spotted falls. Tiny *Roscoa alpina* grew beneath 2-metre high *Indigofera heterantha*, and very tall specimens of *Picea smithiana* grew here. In this part of North West India, terraces had been made by clearing the trees in order to grow vegetables - including cabbages - and top fruit; mainly peaches and plums. Their sharp-eyed driver spotted the only lily that they saw on this holiday; maroon-speckled, white *Lilium polyphyllum*. By a river they found cactus-like *Euphorbia royleana*. 6 - 7 metres high, these native plants have winged ridges with spines in pairs and yellow flowers on the top.

Previously, the road to Rohtang La had been filled with tourists wanting to see the snow, but when the group made the journey they were able to progress reasonably easily, visiting the local town of Manali on the way where they saw an hotel called 'Hotel Yak and Restaurant', with a shop next door selling towels, bed linen and materials.

At 3,000 metres, in an alpine meadow, grasses grew in the scree above the tree line, and above them snow



© Sue Jackman

*Euphorbia royleana*



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*Lilium polyphyllum*

covered the ground. Beautiful mauve *Iris kemaonensis*, with their spotted falls, grew everywhere in the snow melt, as did pink-flowering *Androsace sarmentosa*, dainty *Anemone obtusifolia*, *Gentiana carinata* with its alternate, pointed blue petals, and blue *Corydalis cashmeriana*. Among the flowering primulas were *Primula denticulata* and *Primula rosea* (whose flowers come out before its leaves), and also yellow-flowering

*Oxygraphis glacialis*. *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii*, its stems bent by snow backing up against them, was seen growing on the hillside. The party stopped at a colourful coffee shop on route to stock up with biscuits, etc (as they never knew when they would get their next meal!), and noticed *Thymus linearis* growing among scree nearby.

On the day the party were due to go to Baralacha La, the road was impassable so they visited the Patten Valley. Here they spotted sky-blue *Meconopsis aculeata*; blue, fragrant *Aquilegia fragrans*, and *Rheum webbianum* among many others. When they finally did go to Baralacha La they found the only specimen of cushion-like *Thylacospermum caespitosum* they would see on this trip.

On the way back to their hotel in Keylong, *Lonicera asperifolia* grew by the road and at 4,000m, *Corydalis crassifolia* emerged from the scree.

A group of ibex watched as the minibus descended toward the Bhaga River. Making an early start on the next part of the trip they travelled through to the Lahaul Valley, spotting *Morina coulteriana*, *Cicer microphyllum* and more primulas in the lunar-like landscape, and when they reached Kunzan La at 4,500m there was a colourful Buddhist shrine decorated with prayer flags in the Spiti valley, one of the highest inhabited valleys in the world.



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*Oxygraphis glacialis*

From their next stop at Kaza, they explored the Pin Valley with blue flowered *Linum usitatissimum* growing amongst the rocks as well as *Hyoscyamus niger* (henbane) and the orchid *Dactylorhiza hatagirea*. Higher up in the rough terrain near Kibber (over 4200m), the borage *Arnebia euchroma*, together with mauve *Christolea crassiflora* were discovered.

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*Primula rosea*



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*Linum usitatissimum*

They reached a monastery perched on a sandstone cliff: Ki Gompa. By the Spiti river on the next part of the tour, a plant normally found in the Mediterranean - *Capparis spinosa* - grew prolifically, with *Clematis tibetana* to be found nearby and many *Iris lactea*; one specimen of *I. lactea* unusually had four falls instead of the normal three!

© Sue Jackman



**The monastery: Ki Gompa**

Although they didn't normally spend all the time in the vehicle, on this part of the trip they had driven quite a distance so the walk from Sangla to Chitkul was welcome, and on the way they found white-flowered *Anemone rivularis*; *Polygonatum verticillatum*; *Potentilla atrosanguinea* (with yellow and orange flowers); low growing, pale lilac *Campanula pallida*, and blue *Delphinium pyramidale*.

With dangerous roads (signs warning of either running water or the risk of being hit by rocks dislodged by sheep), encountering several police checkpoints near the border to China, and notices at the side of the road prohibiting mobile phones, I am inclined to think it was more of an adventure holiday! But what a variety of plants they found in the strange, alien and seemingly barren landscapes.

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*Iris lactea* with four falls,  
instead of the usual three



© Peganum

*Potentilla atrosanguinea*

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