

## The Meconopsis Group

### Visit to Lake District gardens from June 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> 2009

From 5-7 June, 2009 members of The Meconopsis Group made an excursion to the Lake District to visit interesting gardens and, in particular, to see some gardens that were rich in *Meconopsis*.

The first garden visited was Professor Haszeldine's at Copt Howe Gardens on the afternoon of 5<sup>th</sup> June. The rain was lashing down all the time we were there. The garden is on the lower slope of a hill and Prof Haszeldine had had to provide drainage and shelter before he could establish his garden. This work was still continuing. He had many interesting trees and shrubs including a good collection of acers. His choice of plants was influenced by his visits abroad. Many of his plants were still in pots.

The next garden to be visited was Professor and Mrs Kinsman's garden at Windy Hall. In the grounds there was a disused quarry which had been full of rubbish when the Kinsmans moved in. They cleared out the rubbish and left the quarry empty while they wondered what to do with it and they were in any case preoccupied with the rest of the grounds. In due course mosses and ferns colonised the quarry so the Kinsmans decided to establish the quarry as a Japanese moss and fern garden. One or two other shrubs such as rhododendrons were added to create more interest. Another unusual feature for this far north was that a camellia hedge was being developed and yet another striking feature was the natural development of two strips of moss to form paths.

On the morning of 6<sup>th</sup> June, we visited Holehird Garden which is maintained by the volunteers of the Lakeland Horticultural Society. Holehird has Plant Heritage (NCCPG) National Collections of *Astilbe*, *Hydrangea* and *Polystichum* (ferns). The weather was better than on the previous day, but we still needed raincoats. We were divided into two groups and were shown round the gardens by two experienced guides. The gardens were colourful, and very well looked after. There were sections of rock garden, perennials, greenhouses and ponds. Plants were well maintained and labelled. The volunteers were very knowledgeable and seemed very pleased to show us what they had achieved. There were quite a number of *Meconopsis* at Holehird and the volunteers are going to build up their collection by taking part in the RHS trial of big blue poppy cultivars. We were treated to a marvellous lunch prepared and served by members of the Society.

On the afternoon of 6<sup>th</sup> June, we visited High Cross Lodge garden, Troutbeck, owned by Mrs L Orchant. The weather was fairer by this time. Mrs Orchant had come to the property 10 years previously and she had designed the garden. Its most eye-catching feature was a series of specimen tree ferns set out in a semicircle. Mrs Orchant is not very fond of flowers, so she had filled her borders with plants such as hostas, grasses, cordylines, phormiums and ferns with only the odd flowering plant here and there to please visitors. There was a most attractive gazebo and a stream running down one side of the garden.

We then visited Deer Bield garden owned by Mr and Mrs Gledhall. The garden is on a fairly steep slope overlooking Lake Windermere. The garden has rhododendrons, azaleas, primulas, magnolias, peonies, many shrubs and trees and a few *Meconopsis*.

On the morning of 7<sup>th</sup> June we visited Dalemain Garden near Ullswater. We met and were accompanied by the head gardener, Rose Harper. Beside the house there was a marvellous handkerchief tree which was just dropping the bracts of its flowers. There was a white garden with alliums, nectarscordiums, irises and oriental poppies - all in flower. The formal garden had a few different *Meconopsis*, including *M. 'Barney's Blue'*, abutilons, species roses. And there was a most spectacular and extensive bed of *Meconopsis 'Dalemain'* (George Sherriff Group) in the wilder part of the grounds beside the lake. This had been introduced to the garden by Sylvia McCosh. In May to June this garden is well worth a visit by *Meconopsis*-lovers.

After lunch at Dalemain restaurant, we headed for Roger Nelson's garden at Four Gables, Brampton. This is the garden where *Meconopsis 'Lingholm'* originated. We had come at an ideal time of the year because the garden was a glorious blaze of colour from plants including azaleas, rhododendrons, primulas, tree paeonies, dogwoods, irises and bluebells. There was an exceptionally fine display of *M. 'Lingholm'* - perhaps to be expected!

Not everything went smoothly - there were two things, not under our control, that influenced our stay. Firstly, torrential rain on the first day and less heavy on the second. Secondly, we had planned that when we were leaving one garden, we would phone the owners of the next garden to be visited so that they would have some idea of when to expect us. Unfortunately, we had not counted on the fact that the hills were so steep that there was no phone reception and we couldn't notify our next hosts. Apart from that, it was a very enjoyable and successful outing.

Some 28 people were on the trip although not everyone visited every garden. We all mixed well.

Special thanks are due to Pat Murphy of the Lake District Horticultural Society garden at Holehird in Windermere and to Peggy Anderson. They worked hard, (along with Cameron in suggesting gardens to visit and with Bob Pearce at Holehird), in organising the programme to make this an enjoyable week-end for members.

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"Visit to the Lake District" by Peggy Anderson and Evelyn Stevens