

From Chengdu to Lhasa: highlights from some of the high passes

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This is just a brief account, reporting on some of the high-lights on this very successful trip to Tibet in 2009, which included seeing many different species of *Meconopsis*. The first was *M. lancifolia* in various colour forms and heights ranging from dark blue to sky blue. The leaves were quite variable as well, from very dark green to purple. All these forms were found on Zheduo Pass. Our next pass, Jian Zi Kou (Scissors Pass) was also very interesting. Here we found three different species: *M. integrifolia* with its large yellow flowers, *M. lancifolia*, blue-flowered, and also a very nice pink flowered specimen. There was just the one plant in an area in which we found 20 blue ones. The third species was *M. racemosa* which was stunning with its red stems and golden hairs and violet blue flowers, a lovely combination, and would be well worth trying to grow in your garden

We have now crossed into Tibet and reached one of our highest passes Dungda La, at 5008m. *M. racemosa* appears again growing in very loose scree but this time it still has the red stem but the spines are quite menacing. As we drive further into Tibet and reach the Galung La, 4400m, we start to see different species occurring growing in shady places usually next to a rock face. We found *M. speciosa*, this species being widespread through the higher regions of Tibet but not as common as *M. racemosa*. *M. speciosa* has pinnate leaves. It is not too hairy and the flower is a light blue colour. This pass was the start of a truly amazing week. We just hit the flowering right. We saw fields of *Caltha sinogracilis* forma *rubriflora* in full flower at the top of the mountain. Then at each bend we walked down we would see new species of plant from *Rhododendron chamaethomsonii* var. *chamaethomsonii*, *Primula dryadifolia* ssp. *congestifolia*, *Omphalogramma tibeticum*, *Lilium saccatum* and finishing off with a whole hillside in full flower of *Primula agleniana*, a sight I will never forget, particularly as it was set off with a glacier behind it.

Serkhyem La, 4600m, was the last major pass and it did not disappoint. On the East side beside the road we came across *M. baileyi* which was a big robust plant to about 1.3m in height with a cluster of blue flowers, but only two plants were found in this vicinity. When we crossed over to the other side we came across another patch of *M. baileyi*. This looked totally different. This patch must have had about 200 plants. It looked stoloniferous and appeared to be a completely different form from the other side of the mountain. The leaves were not as big as the previous one, the flowers seemed smaller and the whole plant looked different. It was growing in the same conditions. i.e. dappled shade and the soil type looked rich in humus. So I think a bit of research is needed to look at these two colonies of *M. baileyi*.

Once we had reached the top of the pass the next day, we were in for a treat. We came across *M. speciosa* again, and a nice new species, *M. impedita*. This species looks like *M. lancifolia* with its strap like leaves but has red stems and a purple flower and it grows to about 30cm. It was found growing amongst dwarf *Rhododendrons* and only 6 plants were found. When we were walking back from the summit we turned a corner and came across a stand of *M. prainiana*. This species grows to about 1.2m. It has strap-like leaves, quite spiny and the flowers open first at the top of the plant with consecutive buds lower down opening later.

To summarise: The trip was amazing, the plants we encountered were stunning, the rich diversity of the *Meconopsis* species and others were outstanding. There has been a lot



Meconopsis racemosa



Meconopsis lancifolia
(pink form)



Meconopsis racemosa



Meconopsis speciosa



Primula agleniana



Caltha sinogracilis



Meconopsis baileyi



Meconopsis baileyi



Meconopsis baileyi



Meconopsis impedita



Omphalogramma tibeticum



Meconopsis henrici