

A closer look at some Nepalese Meconopsis through the lens of Mike Hirst by Jim Jermyn

To commence this lecture I pointed out the featured areas on a map of Nepal, outlining Katchenjunga, Ganesh Himal and Langtang and the Thorung Phedi.

The first area featured was a trek Mike made to **E. Nepal**, notably at the Lumba Samba, 4206m. In rocky terrain and moss filled ledges we find the habitat for a most desirable Meconopsis, *M. discigera*. The form found here shows little variation and displays the most beautiful flowering spike up to about 45cm with many lemon-yellow flowers. This is a monocarpic species. Fine forms of *Saussurea gossipiphora*, gentian *algida* and *Leontopodium monocephalum* were also shown from this locality.

The final pictures shown from eastern Nepal were designed to highlight the variability of *Meconopsis wallichii*. The white form was featured above Basantapur at 2200m while the more typical blue form was shown growing above Tseram at 3770m. Moving on to Simbua Khola below Lapsang there are fine stands of what has been recently described as *M. wallichii* var. *fusco-purpurea* with purplish-red flowers. Is this one, very variable species? Some unanswered questions. This is further compounded with a yellow-flowered evergreen monocarpic species, is this the variable *M. paniculata*?

No doubting a very fine stand of the ginger-orange foliage form of *M. paniculata* photographed at Ghunsa, 4170m. A fine close-up shows the reddish-purple stigma (Taylor). We are very thankful to Mike Hirst for introducing this outstanding form in to cultivation as well as providing these super images. This is one of the best evergreen monocarpics in horticulture.

Our next location is the often trekked **Ganesh Himal**. We are first treated to some superb views of Ganesh 1V, Elephant Mountain, 7104m.

Having trekked beyond Dhunche we arrive at the village of Somdang. This is an interesting area notable for its Lead and Zinc mines at 3500m. Could these minerals be a significant influence on the endemic flora to this area? At Jasta Khana we see an amazing columnular form of a *Meconopsis napaulensis* lookalike. Some recent work carried out by Paul Egan of the RBGE in the same area of C. Nepal gives rise to his recently and newly described species, *M. autumnalis*. This certainly represents a fine plant of considerable potential when it is eventually introduced to cultivation. If there are two closely related species growing in this area represented by pictures taken at Jasta Khana and of the newly-described species at the Pang Sang Pass, this needs to be looked at carefully.

Above the Jasta Khana mine we saw some pictures of *Meconopsis bella* growing in rock ledges at 4300m. It began to resemble a *Paraquilegia* with which one could easily be confused. But on closer inspection it was the very beautiful perennial species that we would love to have success with in our gardens. Margaret and Henry Taylor have in fact succeeded with this plant in their Invergowrie garden. Many years ago I recall Ron McBeath showing pictures of the same species growing in short alpine grassy turf above the Marsyandi Valley, strange that this challenging species should grow in such contrasting conditions. More of this later.

Our next destination was to the **Langtang** and the **Gosainkund**.

More questions are raised with a few pictures of a species that is far too rarely seen in gardens having at one time been a regular inclusion in catalogues. This is *Meconopsis dhwojii* or a diminutive form of *M. Gracilipes* and is a puzzle for the botanists to determine, but great to see images of the bronze-coloured, fern-like foliage so typical of the former species.

The final stop was further west in C. Nepal to the high reaches of the **Thorung Phedi**, close to the Tibetan border at 4460m. This is almost the final destination of the popular Annapurna Trek which leads you through the famous Marsyandi Valley, mentioned earlier.

We see pictures of this quite different form of *Meconopsis bella*, perhaps a variation of the species we saw earlier growing in vertical rock ledges.

Thanks to Mike Hirst we have been treated to some lovely pictures, not only depicting significant species of *Meconopsis*, but also an array of primulas and high alpine plants so typical of the Himalaya. We have been privileged to view some rarely seen forms of species, possibly a new species seen for the first time growing in its native habitat. *Meconopsis discigera* looked at its best as did the very desirable and personal favourite, *M. paniculata* 'Ghunsa Form'.

May I give a sincere thank you to Mike for allowing me to deliver this talk to The Meconopsis Group.

Jim Jermyn