

## Explorers: The Scottish Plant Hunters' Garden

by Julia Corden, (written up by Evelyn Stevens)

Julia Corden, Garden Manager at Explorers: The Scottish Plant Hunters' Garden at Pitlochry, Perthshire, gave a wide-ranging powerpoint presentation. The main aim was to tell of the role of the garden. This is to celebrate the considerable contributions to horticulture and forestry made by a surprisingly large number of intrepid Scottish plant hunters who have explored many parts of the world to bring back to Scotland and the West plant material of value both to enhance our gardens, and also of economic importance, such as seed of forest trees. In the garden, not only are collections of the plants introduced by the various plant hunters on display in areas devoted to them, but also in association with the plantings, there are detailed interpretation boards on the plant hunters themselves. Amongst the plant hunters mentioned by Julia were Francis Masson, who collected in South Africa, David Douglas in North America, and George Forrest and George Sherriff, both important in Himalayan plant exploration. The garden is also enhanced by various art works, both out in the open garden, but also in the intriguing Douglas Pavilion. The latter is also used as a base for various activities ranging from demonstrations of basket weaving to wedding receptions.

A section of the garden of particular interest to our members was the Himalayan area. This is particularly attractive, with some thriving plantings of big blue poppy cultivars donated by Group members, *Meconopsis baileyi*, *M. 'Lingholm'*, *M. napaulensis* (of hort), *M. paniculata*, Asiatic primulas, *Cardiocrinum giganteum* (14 feet high!) and many other plants of Himalayan origin.

Julia showed not only pictures of the plants in the garden, but she also talked of some of her trips to see plants in the wild. This included South Africa, and a trek to Bhutan with a group led by Martin Walsh where she saw a number of *Meconopsis* species including dainty little *M. bella* and the pink-flowered *Meconopsis sherriffii*. The latter was named in honour of one of Scotland's great plant explorers, namely George Sherriff, a name well known to members at our meeting, because of his plant-hunting exploits in the Himalayas and south-east Tibet. For example, he and Frank Ludlow were responsible for introducing into cultivation, plants such as *Meconopsis sherriffii* and *Meconopsis grandis*, the latter in the form known from eastern Bhutan. The latter collection of *M. grandis* seed, namely *M. grandis* GS600 gave rise to the lovely putative hybrids in the *Meconopsis* George Sherriff Group, such as the now well-known *Meconopsis* 'Jimmy Bayne' (George Sherriff Group) and *M. 'Ascreavie'* (George Sherriff Group). There is one particularly fine and vigorous planting of a George Forrest Group clone in the Himalayan area, set against a beautiful stone wall and which was shown in one of Julia's slides. The exact source of this plant is not known and as many of the clones attributed to this Group are very similar, it has not been possible to definitely pin it down to one of the clones named by The *Meconopsis* Group.