

In search of the pink Poppywort by Tim Lever

(written up by Evelyn Stevens, also with the aid of Tim Lever and Martin Walsh's article in "The Alpine Gardener")

In Tim Lever's powerpoint presentation "In search of the pink poppywort", he told of an ambitious trek in 2008 led by Martin Walsh whose primary desire in organising the trek was to re-find in Bhutan the pink-flowered *Meconopsis sherriffii*. This was first discovered by Ludlow and Sherriff in 1936 in Tibet and again in Bhutan in 1949.

The eight members of the Martin Walsh team also included both Tim and Julia Corden, who also spoke of the trip in her talk. With the aid of useful maps Tim described the arduous and exciting trek that meant 17 nights camping, starting from Dur in the Bumthang district of central Bhutan, travelling north-west to Danji. This involved many high passes (several exceeding 5200m), the crossing of a number of rivers and then finally descending southwards to the Nikka Chu located on the main east-west arterial road in Bhutan. Tim also showed an impressive diagram of their trek, plotting height against distance travelled. The entire trek covered a total of 180km in 138 hours of walking, gaining 2854 ((363 feet) in height from the lowest point (2500m) to the highest (nearly 5500m) and in total ascending and descending about 7600m (24,900feet), occasionally in excess of 1000m (3300ft) in a day. This was not a trek for the unfit or faint-hearted and so it was a privilege to be able to experience the trek through Tim's words and pictures.

In his talk Tim delighted us all with his superb pictures of the outstandingly beautiful central Bhutanese scenery and the huge range of lovely plants. The plants included the sought after *M. sherriffii* at the peak of flowering, 125km into their trek at about 4800m close to Danji. The plants were growing, surprisingly, in a granitic bouldery area covered with moss and rhododendron roots and very little soil. Along the way, amongst the other numerous plants seen were a number of other *Meconopsis*. These were large patches of *M. paniculata*, including a pink-flowered one (but which did not possess the usual purple stigma), a number of *M. simplicifolia* including a pink form, *M. horridula*, *M. racemosa*, normally blue, including a pink-flowered one, and *M. bella*, similarly in blue and pink forms, growing on damp rocky outcrops and cliff faces. Amongst other genera there were many rarities, one being *Lilium sherriffii*. As this was a talk for our Group, I will not report on the numerous other exciting plants seen, including numerous *Primula*, *Androsace* and *Saxifraga* species to allude to a few genera, but refer readers to Tim and Martin Walsh's excellent article in The Alpine Gardener for those fortunate enough to have access to it:

The Alpine Gardener, Vol. 78, Sept 2010, pp 308-347.