

A trekking trip to the Lamjung Himal – In search of the Queen of *Meconopsis*

by Jim Jermyn

The talk was presented in the format of PowerPoint and consisted of pictures created by scanning slides taken by world-famous photographer, Dieter Schacht, former Curator of the Alpine Department, Munich Botanic Garden.

Dieter Schacht took part on this Trek in October/November, 1977 and had no expectations of finding the very rare *Meconopsis regia* – what a bonus! The timing was very significant as he had made an earlier trip to the Langtang during the monsoon. Dieter spoke of the wonderful clarity, trekking in the autumn, by comparison to the inevitable cloud and rain during the “floriferous” monsoon. We were, unsurprisingly treated to little in the way of flower colour, but rather spectacular scenery and evocative pictures of the endemic population.

The talk commenced in the bustling Nepalese capital of Kathmandu, followed by more temple and local scenery in Patan. The trek took us through local farmsteads, past recently harvested rice fields and then onwards through the temperate forest zone. We saw views towards the Annapurna range, the famous “Fishtail Mountain”, Machapuchare together with late-flowering shrubs, *Clematis buchaniana* and the sweetly scented *Luculia gratissima*.

Climbing ever higher there were fine views of Lamjung 6986m and then the habitat of such significance to the gathered audience. *Meconopsis regia* has been known in cultivation following its re-introduction during the 1960s from collections made by Polunin, Sykes and Williams as well as Adam Stainton and was much revered by gardeners. It soon hybridised with other closely related species and was lost to cultivation by the early 1970s. No further collections have been made and the prospects do not look good, with very strict regulations regarding the collection of plant material from Nepal, holding sway at present. The lovely rosettes of entire leaves set this species apart from the other, rather confused members of the evergreen monocarpic species. On adjacent cliffs there were some fine rosettes of the ever-popular *Primula aureata*, giving evidence of a habitat similar to that found some 80 miles east in its Locus Classicus in the Langtang National Park and the Gosainkund. At this high altitude we saw pictures of *Saussurea* species and a late-flowering *Delphinium brunonianum*.

The descent took us past fine stands of another *Meconopsis* species that awaits identification, seemingly close to *M. staintonii*. Re-entry in to the forest zone brought some autumn treasures, including: *Pleione praecox* growing on moss-covered trees, superb red-fruited *Paris polyphylla* and the lovely *Primula boothii* subsp. *autumnalis*.

This was a unique view of some of the Nepalese flora and we are indebted to Dieter Schacht for allowing me to scan these slides and create a lecture through PowerPoint.