



The Trillium

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Piedmont Chapter
North American Rock Garden Society
Chapel Hill, Durham, Raleigh, NC

Rambling Roots: Rocking Around the World

By Jared Barnes

Have you ever stopped and thought about how we as gardeners grow? No, I'm not talking about adding years to our lives or inches to our waistlines! I'm talking about how we learn about plants, how we blend science and art in the garden, and how we perfect our craft of horticulture. It's a complex idea, but to help me break it down I entertain analogies and try to relate to something familiar. And, of course, one of the most familiar things in my life is plants.

The way plants grow is interesting. With resources like light, decent temperatures, and ample carbon dioxide, plants can survive. But, they need nutrients to be able to really thrive. And, so plants send out roots and search the earth for what they need to grow. I feel that we gardeners are similar in some aspects. We have our resources—our passion, our tools, our plant palate, etc. But, there comes a time when we want our gardens to improve, when we want to learn, and when we want to be inspired. So, we begin to search for answers and new ideas. We subscribe to magazines, we go to talks, we join garden clubs, and we travel to see gardens. We spread our roots looking for experiences to help us grow.

Travelling is one of the more beneficial of our options because we truly use our five senses to experience new gardens at different times of the year. However, the world is a big place, and not everyone has the chance to travel. Therefore, those of us who have gone, seen, and done have a right and a responsibility to share and help others engage in this global passion. That belief is at the heart of my talk "Rambling Roots: Inspiration for Your Landscape from around the World."

For this article I was asked to give you a taste of my talk, and now that you have the premise, I'll further whet your appetites by looking at three of the many gardens I'll feature. For some diversity, I have chosen a natural area, a private garden, and a public garden, all of which have exquisite examples of rock gardens.

The Mountains of North Carolina

Mother Nature is a most excellent gardener, and some of her finest work can be found in the mountains of North Carolina. Now, before you sigh of the boredom about me mentioning something that's in our own backyard in an article about gardens around the globe, hear me out. For gardeners I believe that one learning opportunity we overlook is exploring and learning about existing plant communities because the lessons I've learned from Nature are invaluable and often can't be taught from a book or in a classroom.

For Nature, rock gardens are a no brainer. On top of Gregory Bald she has ef-



A carpet of moss and *Arenaria* on
Stone Mountain, North Carolina

Photograph by Jared Barnes

fortlessly paired the intense flame orange flowers of *Rhododendron cumberlandense* with the silvery leaves of scraggly *Salix* to make a crisp color combination. And, on Stone Mountain, ancient, topiaried pines are carpeted beneath with a tapestry of moss snowed with the white blossoms of *Arenaria*. Nature tries to fill every crack and crevice with a plant, and seeing *Heuchera americana*, *Aquilegia canadensis*, *Dicentra exima*, and others barely hanging onto sheer cliffs has taught me just how resilient these plants are. She has whimsy that we do not fully appreciate; I have seen her tuck rare jewels like *Helonias bullata* off the beaten path at Pink Beds trail that only the most adventurous can find. I am also amazed at how well Nature tries to stretch the seasons, from the first *Sanguinaria canadensis* and *Hepatica americana* of springtime on the hillsides of the Uwharrie Mountains to the last *Solidago*, *Gentiana*, and *Spiranthes* species that skirt the Blue Ridge Parkway in late autumn. Nature has also taught me the sheer size that plants can get from the mammoth *Liriodendron tulipifera* that it took my family of four to hug in Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest. Truly, there is much to be learned in our own state.

Tennessee Dixter Garden in Paris, Tennessee

Of course, part of my story is where I grew up and the people who had a great impact on my life. I'm sure that many of you, too, were inspired by another gardener. For example, one man who left a huge impression on my youth was Jimmy Williams, and his private garden Tennessee Dixter was instrumental in my learning about horticulture. Williams has one of the most impressive rock gardens I have seen in the southeastern United States. Having no formal training and learning everything from the "school of



Photograph by Jared Barnes

Jimmy Williams's rock garden features a variety of plants that entertain the eyes much more than the street in front of his house

hard knocks," Jimmy has created a paradise that has been toured by thousands and featured in the pages of *Fine Gardening*. His first rock garden had many failures, and he said that it looked like a plant cemetery because all that was left were the labels that looked more like tombstones than identification tags. Just like I discussed above, Jimmy sought inspiration and travelled abroad to see gardens like Great Dixter (the name of his property is a slight alteration of Great Dixter) and Sissinghurst in England. He came back, ripped everything out, and began what today is an exceptional English-styled garden. Perhaps one of the most unique features of his garden is that it is in his front yard! To emulate the English walled garden effect, Jimmy planted a hedge of *Ilex* \times *attenuata* 'Fosteri', which blocks the street and provides a backdrop for his rock garden specimens to pop. Jimmy has planted his garden with a variety of interesting confers and dwarf plants. Another mark that Jimmy's garden left on me was his desire to have something in flower every week of

the year. Thus, even in the typical void of winter he can go into his garden and find *Galanthus elwesii*, *Prunus subhirtella* var. *autumnalis*, and *Narcissus* 'Rijnveld's Early Sensation' in flower, just to name a few.



Zurich Botanic Garden, Zurich, Switzerland

Finally, let's round things out with jump across the "pond" for an impressive public rock garden I've visited—the Zurich Botanical Garden in Zurich, Switzerland. Personally, I liked very much the feel of this rock garden. Stone slabs were scattered amongst knee high vegetation, which conveyed a feeling of a contrived rocky prairie. *Echinops ritro* and *Eryngium campestre* were in flower to provide splashes of color amongst the green. Various geophytes also helped. The gardeners had nicely paired the white flowers of *Galtonia candicans* with the blue-gray foliage of *Yucca* and *Euphorbia* species. A few onions were in flower like *Allium nutans*, *A. flavum*, and *A. carinatum* var. *pulchellum*. The latter was my favorite of the three because the flowers resembled exploding, lavender-colored fireworks. Besides the rock garden, the botanic garden here was quite diverse and had many different sections, including a water garden, a North American natives area, and a colorful border near the street. Scattered



Photograph by Jared Barnes

The Swiss flag composed of *Leontopodium alpinum* for the white and *Verbena* for the red.

throughout the gardens was a plant I was super excited to see it first time in flower—edelweiss (*Leontopodium alpinum*). This flower is probably one of the most famous alpine plants ever because of the song by the same name in Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The Sound of Music*. One of the most unique ways they used this "blossom of snow" was to frame a cross and surround it with red verbena to provide a floral Swiss flag.

Of course, these are only three of the many gardens and natural areas that I've visited around the world. During the talk in January, we will visit gardens in Singapore, Malaysia, Canada, England, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Italy, and the United States of course! Hopefully, what I have to share will provide a source of inspiration for you to use in your gardens. As a final note, I'd like to thank this chapter of the NARGS for inviting me to speak. I have attended a few of your meetings over my graduate school career, and it has been a pleasure learning from such enthusiasts. ☞

How to Say I'm Sorry

In the last issue of *The Trillium*, the plant profile on *Berlandiera subacaulis* was mistakenly attributed. The article was actually beautifully written by Charlie Kidder, member of the Piedmont Chapter board. Mea culpa, Charlie, and I do apologize for this error of mine. MS

Botanical Trekking through the Balkans, June 3-13, 2012

Tony Avent's Travel Report excerpted here by Dave Duch



The goal this trip was to explore the Balkan flora of Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Balkan flora is some of the richest in Europe, with nearly 1,000 endemic plants in the Central and Southern European regions. The presence of ancient rocks at the surface combined with the uplifted mountains which further isolated plant communities resulted in such a unique flora. The Balkan flora includes a number of habitats from climax woodlands to Mediterranean regions to alpine locations and pretty much everything between. The goal was to visit as many different habitats as possible within a short time frame.

Accompanying Tony was Dr. Tom Mitchell of Evolution Plants, who had botanized this area more than ten times. Tom is an evolutionary biologist from England, who will be opening his new nursery in spring 2013, with a specialty in hellebores, peony species, and other rarities. Joining them was Hans Hansen, a Michigan plantsman and director of plant breeding for Walters Gardens.

There are many plants that we already know and grow from the Balkans, including most of the hellebore species, **Paris quadrifolia**, several arum species, **Epimedium alpinum**, several of our favorite hardy geraniums including **Geranium sanguineum** and **Geranium phaeum**, martagon lilies, European ginger, and much more. Many times, plants in the trade which have little heat tolerance are presumed not to be growable in our area, but all too often, all we need to do is collect genetic material from warmer regions. There are few instances of plant explorers from the United States who have spent much time looking at plants from the Balkan region.

The initial exploration began in Slovenia. At an elevation of 650', familiar plants were found on a gently sloping wooded hillside. The hillside was filled with **Epimedium alpinum** by the thousands. Among the epimediums was the common European ginger, **Asarum europaeum**. Among the asarums and epimediums were the unmistakable spotted leaves of pulmonaria. Although it wasn't known what species grows in this region, it's been years since any new wild genetic material of pulmonaria has been introduced into existing breeding lines. **Asplenium scolopendrium** was here also, giving an odd tropical feel to an obviously cold winter climate. Tony had often wondered how this plant could truly be winter hardy to Zone 5, but here was the proof. The further they walked, the more ferns they found. **Dryopteris filix-mas** was here, along with the rock polypody, **Polypodium vulgare**. Although certainly not plentiful at this site, it was great to see stunning clumps of the shield fern, **Polystichum setiferum**, with some that spanned nearly 4' in width. A glance upward revealed a hillside of **Helleborus niger** - Christmas Rose. Not only was **Helleborus niger** here, but **Helleborus atrorubens** was also growing alongside.



Photograph by Tony Avent

Paris quadrifolia



The plant that really shocked Tony, however, was **Salvia glutinosa** - Woodland Sage. This lovely yellow-flowered woodland sage wasn't expected this far west, and certainly wasn't expected to be found growing with asarum, hellebores, and epimediums. Small, but plentiful clumps of **Polygonatum multiflorum** (European Solomon's seal), growing with a lovely monkshood, **Aconitum lycoctonum** were also observed, as well as martagon lilies growing happy as clams in the deep shade among the hellebores.

The next stop was Croatia. South of Rude, at 1,700' elevation at a roadside memorial, **Ruscus hypoglossum**, was found with some fruit remaining...always good to help distinguish male plants from the fruiting females. **Paris quadrifolia** was more plentiful here than anywhere else on the entire trip, growing alongside **Arum maculatum** and an interesting euphorbia. Also plentiful at this site was one of Tony's favorite lamiums, the clumping **Lamium orvala**, although most of the flowers had already finished at this

elevation. One of the pulmonarias found at this site had unquestionably the largest leaf any of the group had ever seen.

They stopped next at 1,300' elevation in an interesting patch of woods where they found more **Helleborus niger**, this time mixed in a hybrid swarm with the wide-leaf **Helleborus multifidus ssp. istriacus** x **Helleborus torquatus**. The variation in **Helleborus niger** here was quite odd, suggesting again the possibility of some species intergrades. Another particular huge-leaf form of **Helleborus niger** had unusually large overlapping leaf lobes. Unfortu-



Photograph by Tony Avent

Lamium orvala in flower

nately, there was no hellebore seed set at this site. Here also was the first and only patterned-leaf form of **Hepatica nobilis**. A short distance from this site in an open sunny field were more **Helleborus multifidus ssp. istriacus**, along with the lovely **Salvia pratensis**, a familiar looking **scabiosa**, and the architecturally-fascinating **Veratrum nigrum** growing against the rocks. Again, the quest for seed bearing hellebores was unfulfilled.



Photograph by Tony Avent

Helleborus multifidus istriacus

The next stop, at 2,654', were **Lamium orvala** with much darker flowers than is typical with that species. This has long been a favorite plant in the garden although it fares much better in cooler climates. The highlight of this stop was the rare Solanaceous **Scopolis carniolica** that they found in full flower...both the white and more rare red-flowered forms. At 3,000' elevation, the lovely **Clematis alpinia** was observed hanging from the roadside cliff alongside **Corydalis ochroleuca**, **Anemone narcissiflora**, and a lovely fern that resembled our native **Athyrium filix-femina**.



Photograph by Tony Avent

Clematis alpinia

quite well in both shade and sun...strange for a plant known to require all day sun. **Dictamnus albus** was also in full flower at this elevation and what an incredible sight it was.

Yet another site brought the first sighting of the typically Asian **Polygonatum odoratum** (Solomon's seal). Also here were more pulmonaria including some with 18" long leaves...probably a different species than had seen earlier. The first sighting of what was thought to be **Euphorbia polychrome** was spotted growing side by side with patches of **Geranium sanguineum**...one of the best geraniums for us in Raleigh. This was the first time **Cyclamen repandum** was seen growing right next to **Asarum europaeum**, **Helleborus multifidus** ssp. **istriacus**, **Hepatica nobilis**, **Asplenium trichomanes**, and **Galanthus nivalis** in seed...what a superb combination.

After Croatia, the next stop was Bosnia. At an elevation of 2,800', huge populations of **Acanthus hungaricus** var. **balcanicus** including several lovely streaked variegated forms and a clone with five distinct lobes were found. Other fascinating plants at this site were what appeared to be two forms of **ferula** (fennel), both with finely cut foliage and one with very long leaves. Also flowering here was quite a bit of



Photograph by Tony Avent

Paeonia officinalis

Gladiolus italicus and a nearly finished patch of **Muscari tenuifolium**. In this population of **Helleborus multifidus** var. **multifidus** were some lovely pewter-leaf forms. The next stop at 3,050' was truly amazing. More arums were discovered, but as soon as the flower was examined, it was determined to be one of the target plants, the little-known **Arum longispathum**, which arum expert Peter Boyce said hasn't been cultivated in over 100 years.



Arum longispathum

Photograph by Tony Avent

Ajuga genevensis, and a charming little scutellaria that resembled some of our southeast US natives. In light shade there was also quite a bit of **Arum nigrum**, and in rocky sunny areas sedums were everywhere including **Sedum acre** and **Sedum hispanicum**. **Helleborus torquatus**. Although no double flower forms of **Helleborus torquatus** appeared here, a patch of variegated leaf plants was seen, which obviously come fairly true from seed.

The Balkans are certainly an area with tremendous horticultural potential for a large part of the US, both in terms of potential garden plants as well as plant breeding genetics. The region is also an area with rich potential for commercial ventures for export-minded Balkan horticulturists. Now that the conflicts in the region have died down, more individuals should travel and explore this amazing region. ☞

Next was Montenegro. At the first stop, 3,400', **Helleborus multifidus** ssp. **hercegovinus** with frighteningly excellent seed set, was found. Just when the group thought they had seen the thinnest leaves on **Helleborus multifidus**, they found some even thinner at the next site. **Primula veris** was also found growing here in full sun, but this time with flower spikes that greatly topped the foliage, which differed much from the other forms seen on the trip. Also here was an amazing ajuga with 18" flower spikes, that was assumed to be



Helleborus torquatus variegated

Photograph by Tony Avent

Appalachian Spring at the Southern Highlands Reserve

by Bobby J. Ward

The Southern Highlands Reserve is tucked away above Lake Toxaway in western North Carolina. At an elevation of 4,500 ft. (1,371 m), spring arrives here a bit later in the Southern Appalachians. One of the memorable sights that NARGS visitors will see in early May is the rare pinkshell azalea (*Rhododendron vaseyi*), the first azalea species to bloom along the trails at the reserve, its pink-to-white flowers appearing before new leaves emerge. The pinkshell, originally native to four counties in North Carolina, grows vigorously at the site to a height of about 12 ft. (3.6 m). When I was there last spring, the woods seem to be full of its blossoms, which could be seen for some distance among the leafless understory.

What is the Southern Highlands Reserve and why is it included on the NARGS tour? It is a combination native plant arboretum and research center, encompassing about 120 ac. (48 h), set among both a



Photograph by Bobby J. Ward

Rhododendron vaseyi, pinkshell azalea

natural woodlands and a park of planted species native to the highlands region of the Southern Appalachians. Visitors to this private reserve, which was founded in 2002, will readily understand its mission of advocating protection of the highlands ecosystem through educa-

tion, restoration, and research, not only for plants but for small animals as well. For example, the site is home to the endangered Carolina northern flying squirrel, which migrated south along the mountain ridges during the last Ice Age and for the last 10,000 years has remained “stranded” at high elevations among red spruce and fir forests.

The reserve receives about 75 in. (190 cm) of rainfall per year because the mountain range is in a vanguard position for regional summer storms and those from the Gulf of Mexico. Thus the vegetation here is lush and diverse. At this elevation, deciduous shrubs and trees will just begin to be producing new leaves during the NARGS site tour.

Spring woodland ephemerals will likely be at their peak in early May. These include various species (and a few cultivars) of *Claytonia*, *Clintonia*, *Uvularia*, *Iris*, *Thalictrum*, *Tiarella*, *Phlox*, *Trillium*, *Viola*, *Cypripedium*, *Sanguinaria*, *Anemone*, and *Heuchera*. There are trails that lead over varied topography and forest types (hardwoods and conifers) with high canopies, along rustic bridges, and to overlooks toward distant vistas. At least three species of ferns will be producing new growth in early May: cinnamon, hay scented, and New

York ferns. There are several picture-worthy areas with carpets of shiny leaves of *Galax* and a backdrop of pink-shell azalea.

The Southern Highland Reserve also contains a collection of a “swarm” of azaleas known as the Gregory Bald azaleas. These are naturally occurring hybrid native azaleas comprised of *Rhododendron arboreum*, *R. viscosum*, *R. cumberlandense*, and *R. calendulaceum*. Unfortunately, they won’t come into peak bloom with rainbow colors until late May and early June. (Gregory Bald is a grassy-top mountain to the west along the border with Tennessee.)

The reserve is divided into two parts—a natural woodlands (with an elevation change of about 1,000 ft. or 300 m) and an easy walk through the central area called the Core Park, the latter including an azalea walk, a seven-



Photograph by Bobby J. Ward

ring wildflower labyrinth, laurel woods trail, and Vaseyi (irrigation) pond. Spring-blooming shrubs on the site include blueberries, witchhazel, deciduous hollies, *Kalmia*, *Clethra*, *Leiophyllum* (mountain or sand myrtle), and *Hydrangea*. There is also a grove of American yellowwood trees (*Cladrastis*) and scattered *Magnolia fraseri* and *M. acuminata*. ❧

[This article originally appeared in NARGS’ *Rock Garden Quarterly*, winter (January) 2013, pages 31 – 33.]

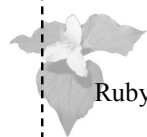


Exploring the Flora of the Blue Ridge
Asheville, NC - May 2 - 5, 2013

Registration Information

The preferred method for registration is via the Registration form on the website (www.nargs2013.org).

If you do not have computer access, fill out contact Bobby Wilder at 919-755-0480 for a form and mail it with a check to the Conference Registrar: Bobby Wilder, 2317 Elmsford Way, Raleigh, NC 27608. Make check payable to “NARGS – Piedmont Chapter”.



NARGS Piedmont Chapter Meeting

JC Raulston Arboretum
Ruby McSwain Education Building

January 19, 2013 9:30a.m.
Great Gardens, Part I: "Rambling Roots —
Inspiration for Your Landscape from
Around the World"

Jared Barnes
Ph. D. horticulture student, NCSU
Raleigh, N.C.

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Food Goodies to Share

If your last name begins with the letter below,
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Jan: L-M Feb: N-So March: Sp-Z April: Any and all

Thanks to the Seed Exchange Packers and Supporters

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Amelia Lane, Anne Porter, Bob Pries, Bobby Ward, Bobby
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Piedmont Chapter NARGS 2013 Program—through April, 2013

"Mining the Balkans for Great Plants"
February 16, 2013

Tony Avent, Owner, Plant Delights Nursery
Raleigh, N.C.

"Lessons Learned from a Poet's Garden"
March 16, 2013

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Great Gardens, Part II: "South Africa, Italy,
France, and Brazil"
April 20, 2013

David White, Chair, Piedmont Chapter NARGS
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