

Preface

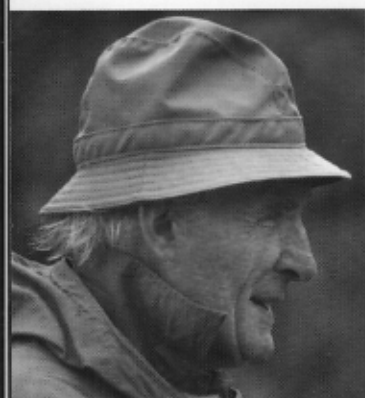
If by some unlikely chance I can persuade but one reader ... to accompany me upon my wanderings and to share my triumphs and disappointments, then indeed shall I have achieved something worth achieving, and have added yet one more to the pleasures that I owe to plants.

This is a book I have long wanted to write, for reasons very similar to those described so eloquently above by John Raven (Raven & Raven, 2012). I am hugely grateful, first and foremost, to Andrew and Anne Branson, the founders of British Wildlife Publishing, who commissioned me to write the book, and to their successors at Bloomsbury Publishing who took on the imprint and saw the book to fruition.

I can trace my interest in mountain flowers back to my time at Aberdeen University. Although my botany degree concentrated mainly on plant physiology, I was lucky enough to enjoy several field courses at Bettyhill in Sutherland, where I first got to know the plants of Britain's arctic fringe. Then an honours-year field trip took me to Obergurgl in the Austrian Alps, where I was enthralled by the beauty of the flora, but intrigued by the contrasts with the Scottish mountain flora that I was beginning to know. Professors Charles Gimingham and Paul Jarvis and Dr Bernard Kenworthy were among my inspirations on these field trips. I also made my first trip to the Arctic in 1987 in expert company, joining a British Ecological Society field meeting at Abisko in the far north of Sweden (and I led my own field trips both there and to the Alps in later years).

But perhaps the greatest influence came in 1981, when I treated myself to a field course on mountain flowers at the Kindrogan Field Centre of the Scottish Field Studies Association (now the Field Studies

OPPOSITE PAGE:
Alpine Saxifrage in
the Breadalbane hills,
Perthshire.



Grant Roger, my late friend and mentor, in his natural habitat at Morrone Birkwood near Braemar in 1985.

Council) in Perthshire. The course was run by one of the true doyens of Scotland's mountain flora, J Grant Roger. Grant had graduated in botany from Aberdeen in 1944. In 1950, he became one of four staff in Scotland of the newly established Nature Conservancy, responsible for his home patch of north-east Scotland. This allowed him to spend many days in the hills, getting to know the flora of key montane sites and discovering new localities for species like Woolly Willow and Mountain Bladder-fern. Grant was not just expert at identifying mountain plants, he was also full of fascinating tales about the plants' discovery, ecology and folklore – and so Grant is the inspiration for this book, which I could never have contemplated without his insights.

For several years, I helped Grant run the mountain flowers course, then, when age sadly meant that Grant had to retreat from the hills, I continued running the course until 2004. Situated in the hills between Pitlochry and Blairgowrie, Kindrogan was an ideal centre because we could guarantee to see more than half of the British montane species in six busy days in the hills (I have also drawn on Kindrogan courses I attended on ferns, sedges and critical plants in writing this book). The many students on the course over the years, and the students on lecture courses on mountain flowers I ran for the Extramural Department of Edinburgh University, were a huge inspiration – and, ever since, I have wanted to write this book.

One of those students, Sonia Hackett, became my wife, and I shared many wonderful days on the hill with her. She brought her architect's eye to spotting subtle differences in the rocks and vegetation, which greatly aided our explorations. Tragically, she died much too young in a chairlift accident when we were botanising in the Alps, and I dedicate this book to her memory and her inspiration.

In recent years, I have spent less time in the British hills and more time exploring foreign floras, but the Arctic and mountains have always been my main inspiration. As a guest speaker on cruise ships, I have been able to botanise regularly in Iceland, northern Norway, Svalbard and Greenland. I have also drawn on that experience to inform this book, and I thank my second wife Sue for her enthusiasm and expertise on these trips – and for her patience while I have been writing this book.

To make the book as comprehensive as possible, I have delved back through past issues of *British Wildlife* and through the many publications of the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) and the Botanical Society of Scotland (BSS). I have extracted lots of valuable insights from those and from the many field meetings organised by these two societies

that I joined, especially in the Scottish mountains. It goes against all my instincts not to give precise references to validate these records and acknowledge their authors, but so many references would completely overwhelm the book. I have therefore cited only a few key references for readers who want to know more about the sites or the species concerned. Instead, I gratefully acknowledge all the botanists who tirelessly explore the hills and meticulously record their discoveries in the botanical press.

In particular, I have drawn heavily on the amazing insights in the *New Atlas of the British & Irish Flora* (Preston *et al.*, 2002), and I offer a debt of thanks to its editors and species authors, and to the many hundreds of individual botanists whose records made the *Atlas* possible. My hope is that my book will inspire many more to take to the hills and record their findings, so that we can add still further to our knowledge and understanding of Britain's mountain flowers. The wonderful new multivolume *Flora of Great Britain and Ireland* (Sell & Murrell, 1996–2014) has also been invaluable, and I only wish Volume One had been available when I was writing, to update my knowledge on ferns, willows and other key families. Needless to say, any errors of fact and interpretation are entirely mine!

In writing the book, I have troubled many busy people for the latest news about sites and species, and I would like to thank them all for their unfailing patience and helpfulness. In particular, I thank Andy Amphlett, Norman Baldock, William Berry, Ken Butler, John Clarke, Neil Cowie, John Crossley, Lynne Farrell, Lorne Gill, William Gloyer, Clare and Daniel Gordon, Peter Gordon, Alan Halewood, Peter Jepson, Miles King, Liz Lavery, Peter Llewellyn, Alex Longton, David Mardon, Ron McBeath, Pat and Angus Macdonald, Heather McHaffie, Eric Meek, Chris Miles, Adam Nicolson, David Parker, Faith and Sarah Raven, Tim Rich, Fred Rumsey, John Savory, Gill Smart, Ian Strachan, Pete Stroh, Des Thompson, Judith Turner, Kevin Walker and Tim Waters. My copy editor, Hugh Brazier, offered invaluable insights, especially on the changing interpretation of Welsh and Gaelic mountain names by the Ordnance Survey. I am also grateful to all the photographers whose images so greatly enhance the book, and to David Price-Goodfellow at D & N Publishing for his guidance on using these to most striking effect. Special thanks also to Carry Akroyd for turning my rough notes and reference photos into such a beautiful and inspiring cover. Finally, I thank my editor, Katy Roper, for applying her enquiring mind to my musings.

Michael Scott, Lochcarron, January 2016



A mountain flowers field course in 1997, with me pontificating at the transplant site for Brown Bog-rush below Ben Vrackie in Perthshire. The 'student', Jim McIntosh, has since gone on to great things as Scottish Officer of the BSBI.