

HERBS

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This pictorial newsletter gives you the latest Hermanus Botanical Society news and views on the fynbos scene. It also appears on our website www.fernkloof.com

100th Edition

This June issue of Herbs marks the 100th edition of the Hermanus Botanical Society Newsletter

The first issue was printed in June 1986. The then Chairman, Dr. W. Dickie-Clark thanked Mari Fouche for 'undertaking the first publication' and expressed the 'hope that this newsletter will be sent to you, the members, every three months'. This hope has certainly been realised!

From typewriters to keyboards, from black and white to colour, and from licking envelopes and sticking stamps to the internet, the hope is that it continues to inform and hopefully entertain all BotSoc members for many years to come!

Recognition must go to the Newsletters previous editors: Jose Burman, Lee Burman and Geraldine Gardiner.

It is fitting that the main contribution to this edition should be one from Anne Bean, a BotSoc member and long-standing member of the Fernkloof Advisory Board

THE 'LIGHTER' SIDE OF BOTANISING!

Anne Bean was Scientific Officer at the Bolus Herbarium at the University of Capetown for 30 years and has co-authored two fieldguides: 'Hottentots Holland to Hermanus' with Lee and Jose Burman, and 'Stellenbosch to Hermanus' with Amida Johns.



One of the most enjoyable aspects of the professional botanist's life is the field trip. Once you've completed the initial survey of the dried specimens in the herbarium, and this has revealed to you the main problem areas in the group, you need to get out and see your plants in nature. **(The photograph shows Anne, on right, with botanist colleagues Michael Viviers, Wendy Hitchcock and Jan Vlok about to set out to the Baviaanskloof– note the large wooden flower presses on the top!)**

Make a list of the localities it is reasonable to visit on this occasion, and assemble all the 1:250 000 maps you need to take with you. Now you need to ensure that you have the necessary permission to explore the area; you need a collecting permit from the appropriate government department, which will give you permission to collect samples from certain plants, which you must list on their form beforehand, and only once you have the written permission from the landowner. You, of course, do not know which species you will find in advance of seeing the place, so some creative writing will ensue. Much veld has been so over-

collected by sheep and goats that you can usually see there is no good investigating further, but you cannot know this beforehand.

Furthermore, you will have no name to apply to the new plants you discover until long after you get back from your trip; sometimes only after some years, if the plant is new to science; however, officially, you must not collect anything which has no name. As there is little point in going to places where the plants all have good names, from the start of your expedition to no-one-knows-land you will already be caught up in a web of imponderables. The reality is that you collect all the plants you think will be interesting, because they are in good flower or fruit, and because almost nowhere in the Cape have botanists collected so thoroughly that nothing you see on your trip will be of interest. You can safely assume that good flowering material of almost everything will be worth collecting.

Once you have found them, you will have a burning wish to have some idea of the identity of your more enigmatic collections. This is one of the most exciting aspects of your trip. In fact, you are now indulging in the cutting edge of your work. You and Darwin So a box of books is put alongside the map roll on the seat between you so you can make the first tentative identifications while you are driving on to the next collecting stop

You still lack one necessary document: the written permission from the landowner to collect on his farm. You cannot anticipate which land will be worth exploring until you see it. Once you have seen a good patch of what looks like pristine veld, there is still no easy way to find out who owns it; often no farmhouse is visible for perhaps kilometres away around the next hill; or mountain. Mostly, no human is seen all day. There are two possible techniques for flushing out the owner. The first involves climbing through the fence (if any) with secateurs and collecting bags, and setting about making your first gatherings. You will know you have found the landowner when he fires a rifle shot, hopefully only over your head. The tone of the conversation that follows will depend on how many sheep the owner has recently had stolen. You hope he will be courteous enough to listen to your explanations. A modification of your technique would be to carry with you, along with your secateurs and plastic collecting bags, a roll of loo paper and a trowel. You will usually be bending down harvesting your treasure when you spy his approach, so you now make haste to hide your bags and secateurs near some conspicuous, readily re-found big shrub, and emerge adjusting your apparel and brandishing paper roll and trowel. He will seldom expect you to explain yourself, but will be watching you go on your way. Sometimes you may have to jettison your expensive secateurs ...otherwise you may be fortunate to be able to return some time later when you hope he has gone home.

Once they have recovered from their fury at your trespass, landowners are usually forgiving and pleased to chat, often extending an invitation to come back for a meal, or stay over; such an invitation will be welcome if the weather has turned brutal, but if not, then such is the hospitality of the plattelanders that the opportunity to pursue your passion, your plant collecting, is often vitiated by your inability to convince your would-be host that you are actually at work, not wanting to *kuier* just now. Hospitality is a serious botanising pitfall. If you are me, there is an additional impediment peculiar to the female of the breed, for your host will also be intensely curious about your home life. Why are you not at home cooking supper for your husband? Why are you swanning about with two obviously eligible young men and no chaperone? A middle-aged, female, husband-less rooinek, nogal a *plantkundige*, is no part of platteland culture. That you have a passion for collecting veld bossies is unbelievable.

Assuming that you can break away with no more than a couple of dops, you will usually find that he greets your request that he give you written permission to collect plants on his land with a wave of the hand. You may take whatever you like. You now have the permission but none of the legal paperwork, but you have to make do with this. And you have a long trek back to where you *cached* your treasures.

It will now be late; you still have no campsite, and you must press your collections and write up your field notes before going to bed. It is often not much before midnight that you can shut your

eyes. But the freedom you have about where you will doss down is one of the happinesses of fieldwork. I have slept in many wonderful places, always wild, never in campsites, usually far from people. Listening to the voice of Maria Callas or great symphonic music while sitting on a jeep track on the spine of the Swartberg mountain with a glass of Cape wine, surrounded by pristine fynbos watching the sun go down, must be an unsurpassable experience. Hearing a blaasoppie toad grunting his call a foot or two down under my head while I slept in the Knersvlakte; waking at frosty dawn in a *bergwagter's* hut at 4000' up the Kammanassie mountain and breaking the ice on the water in the gutter for a perfunctory wash, before locating a population of an elusive *Agathosma* last seen in 1810; cooking Hollandaise sauce for a last camping supper at the pull-out half way up the Van Rhyns Pass, out of the last remains of garlic, butter, eggs and vinegar to put on our last potatoes. 13 cloves of garlic were probably rather too much, we had to admit, afterwards. The sunset was magnificent.



The joy of exploring truly pristine veld is unsurpassable. Exhilaration grows with every step you take. Rediscovering a plant growing where its first collector recorded it, in the same season, a hundred years ago, is for me still a ridiculous astonishment: a total delight, and nowadays a rare one. Too much veld is used up, the fynbos transformed to weeds or crops. Most field trips these days are clouded by outrage over the fate of our botanical heritage. Undisturbed fynbos is now largely confined to upper mountain slopes inaccessible to goats and sheep. Probably in our

lifetimes, there will be no pristine places left to explore.

My job was poorly paid, but the perks were unbeatable and as Angus, my husband used to say quite irritably, "you'd do this work even if you were unpaid". He is an accountant, expert in tax law and the administration of deceased and insolvent estates I miss field trips!

Anne Bean

Fernkloof's Aloe Garden is the Place to Visit

This winter remember to pay a visit to the Aloe garden at Fernkloof where a large and interesting variety of aloes and succulents will be sporting their striking flowers over the next few months. Erich Kuschke has been responsible for the planting up and maintaining of the garden over the last ten years, initially donating his private collection of Aloes, and then collecting on his travels throughout Southern Africa. Of the 126 documented Aloe species countrywide, only 20 occur in the winter rainfall region.

Thank you to Erich for his endeavours!



Aloe thraskii in all its splendour!



An unusual smaller variety of *Cotyledon orbiculata*

WHAT'S FLOWERING



Amphithalea virgata



Drosera trinervia

Amphithalea virgata, of the Fabaceae family, is a resprouting shrub up to 30cm, with narrow ericoid leaves. It can be found on mountain slopes and flats and has attractive spikes of pink flowers from May through to September. This species is described as VULNERABLE in the Red List of South African Plants. Fernkloof has 5 species of *Amphithalea*.

Drosera trinervia, of the Droseraceae (Sundew) family, is found on peaty, dampish slopes and has a striking, basal rosette of wedge shaped leaves. The leaves of these insectivorous plants are covered in glandular tentacles, each tipped with a drop of sticky fluid. You may be lucky enough to spot the dainty, porcelain-like white flowers (sometimes pink) which bloom between July and November. There are 7 species of *Drosera* in Fernkloof.



Freesia alba



Syncarpha canescens

Freesia alba, of the Iridaceae family, flowers in June and July. It grows in coastal fynbos and can be spotted along our Cliff Path often hiding in the shade of other plants. The attractive white flowers (often mauve on the underside) are sweetly scented. The style is long and exserted with deeply divided branches. There is only one species in Fernkloof. The hybridization of our South African freesias has resulted in elegant, long-stemmed, brightly coloured flowers that make them highly desirable in the commercial cutflower industry of today.

The shocking-pink bracts of *Syncarpha canescens*, the 'Pink everlasting' can be seen on the drier south facing slopes. The plant has grey, soft textured leaves. Fernkloof has 6 species of *Syncarpha*, the large papery-white bracts of *Syncarpha vestita* the most noticeable of our species when it flowers from November.

HAVE YOU HEARD

- The Fernkloof Nursery Easter Sale generated the sum of R26,999.00 which considering the dire water situation is remarkable. Jack would like to express a very big thank you to the many volunteers who assisted with the sale. The long range weather forecast is for good rains, so it would be a good time to tackle those neglected gardens in order to get the plants nicely established before the next dry summer!

- In case you were wondering what on earth the fluorescent green no-name labels signify in the Fernkloof Gardens: it is a secret code to the resident baboon troop asking them in the politest possible way please to leave the buds on the *Protea cynaroides*, and not use them as baby soccer balls. The monitors are in on this covert mission!

- A Butterfly Census week was held from the 23rd to 1st May this year and the aim is to continue this censusing biannually. Butterflies are good indicators of ecosystem health. South Africa has about 800 species, of which about 10% are threatened with extinction. Between 200-230 species occur in fynbos. A butterfly often seen in the Fernkloof Gardens is the 'Garden Acrea' (right), whose larval foodplant is the Wild Peach, *Kiggelaria africana*.



- As reported in the last edition of Herbs, the Kirstenbosch South African entry into this year's Chelsea Flower Show had had to be cancelled because of lack of funds. The good news is that the Western Cape Provincial Government and the South African Gold Coin Exchange came to the rescue to sponsor the exhibit and by the time this edition goes to press South Africa will hopefully have earned another gold medal!

- Three years after the fire little plants of *Erica spumosa* can be seen growing from the cracks in the rocks at Klipspringer corner. Hopefully they should flower in late spring. The species name 'spumosa' means 'full of foam' and refers to their foam-like flower heads.

- Bruniaceae, a family endemic to the South West Cape, has two related genera, *Brunia* and *Berzelia*. How do you tell which is which? *Brunia* has two styles projecting beyond five petals, while *Berzelia* has one. All members of the family have leaves ending in a black tip. The genus *Berzelia* honours Swedish chemist Berzelius. Some species have a bright red appendage on the flower stems (such as our *Berzelia abrotanoides*) some do not. No-one knows why?



Brunia albiflora



Berzelia abrotanoides with red appendages

A 'BLUE BOBARTIA'!



Fernkloof has 5 species of Bobartia – all these species having yellow flowers, but did you know that a blue-flowered variety exists? An expedition to the upper reaches of the Baviaansrivier off Bain's Kloof by members of The Bulb Society of SA resulted in the finding of the beautiful *Bobartia lilacina*.

Instead of the normal groups of bright yellow flowers in a head, this species has single blue to mauve flowers, and the flower stalks are extremely sticky!

Reference: IBSA Newsletter April 2011

Photograph : Rod Saunders

DATES TO DIARISE

May 20th

Cameron McMaster, renowned expert on indigenous bulbs, will present an illustrated talk on 'Bulbous Plants of the Overberg'

June 17th

Rosanne Stanway will talk on the fascinating subject of 'Plant Pollinator Interactions and Implications of Global Change on Pollination Web Structure'

July 15th

BOTSOC's 'Soup and Sherry Evening'

August 19th

Lynda de Wet, renowned botanical artist, and winner of a Kirstenbosch Botanical Biennale Gold Medal in 2010 will present an illustrated talk. Title to be announced.

September 22nd to 25th

Fernkloof Flower and Eco-Fair

All talks take place in the Fernkloof Hall on the 3rd Friday of the month at 7.00pm

We welcome any contributions to, or feedback on the newsletter.

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