

SUMMER IN THE PINDOS TRIP REPORT

2017

Campanula columnaris

Day 1 1 July – To Agios Germanos

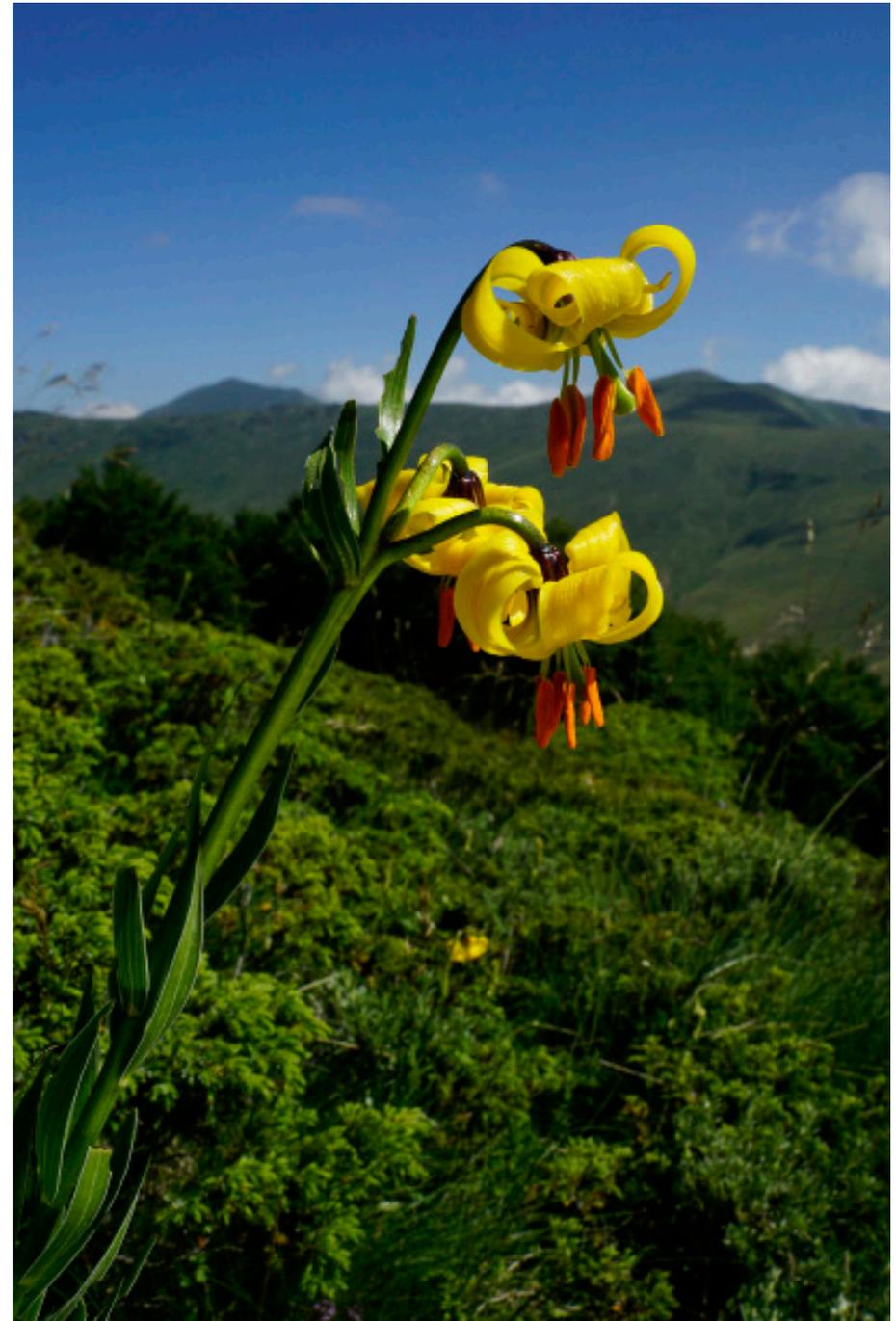
NB This revised tour itinerary travels direct to Agios Germanos.

Previously we visited Mount Vermion to look for *Lilium chalcedonicum*, but now have better locations for this species later in the tour.

Day 2 2 July – Mount Vournos

Leaving the hotel, we passed alongside the tranquil Prespa Lakes, stopping at a good vantage for the views across the reed-fringed lakes low mountains and attractive bean cultivation below. The road then climbed into an extensive tract of beech forest with stands of *Silene armeria* along the way. A rougher road then continued up towards some large wind turbines, exiting the forests and passing through rocky meadows with spires of *Digitalis viridiflorus*, various *Dianthus*, *Viola* and *Hypericum*. The vehicles made it to 2000 metres from where we walked exploring various areas of alpine meadows, principally to find *Lilium carniolicum*, but encountering many other species. There were stands of lilac *Knautia magnifica*, fine yellow columns of *Verbascum longifolium* punctuated the meadow, whilst rocky areas had plentiful deep pink *Geranium macrorrhizum* and pale pink *Sedum hispanicum*. There were some lilies too with a fine backdrop of the distant lakes we had driven past earlier. However, far better lilies were to come. In fact, we found a few superb five- and six-flowered specimens immediately behind where we had parked.

The terrain was ripe for walking and it was possible to easily access many areas of meadow further on passing more fine populations of *Lilium carniolicum* as well as *Geranium aristatum* and *Doronicum austriacum* in patches of beech woods. The tracksides and meadows had various colour forms of *Viola macedonicum*, from yellow or white to purple. Little powder-blue *Jasione laevis* grew nearby and there was the somewhat unusual *Campanula foliosa*, wiry clumps of *Dianthus deltoides*, the magenta discs of *Geranium subcaulescens* and various thymes. The weather was perfect with warm sun and little wind and a very pleasant afternoon was spent wandering about the wide mountain top before driving back down to our little village and a filling Greek dinner.



Lilium carniolicum

Day 3

3 July – To Papigo via Aaos Lake

Greece's fast motorway network allows us to move between the best flower areas quite easily. Reaching the pleasant mountain town of Metsovo, the road climbed into the hills where the woods were guilded with the spires of *Digitalis grandiflora*, a very handsome herb, that grew alongside plentiful *Dactylorhiza saccifera*. The latter was also plentiful in wet areas around the placid Aaos Lake where some particularly tall specimens grew with *Epipactis palustris*. Marshy slopes had lots of *Filipendula ulmaria* and a few flowering *Veratrum album*. Elsewhere around the lake serpentine seeps were plastered with the sticky leaves of the delightful *Pinguicula crystallina* with pretty violet-like lilac flowers. The roadsides were brimming with stately *Verbascum speciosum*, the handsome but spiny *Ptilostemon afer*, equally prickly steely-blue *Eryngium amethystinum*, *Campanula spathulata* and the deep pink of *Lychnis coronaria* too. Our hotel for the night was in the picturesque village of Papigo, a classic stone-built Zaghorian village that nestles at the foot of the spectacular limestone ramparts of Mount Tymphi where billowing masses of *Clematis flammula* decorated the trees.

Day 4

4 July – Vikos Gorge

Today was a mixture of culture and flowers. The plunging chasm of the Vikos Gorge is the deepest in Europe if not the world and the road led through pleasant countryside with occasional plant of the the impressive late-flowering orchid *Himantoglossum caprinum* and plenty of white-lipped *Digitalis lanata*. Climbing above Monodendri we entered a remarkable area of limestone fancifully names the 'lost city' and it did indeed suggest an ancient civilisation had once existed there. Areas of oak woods had a few *Lilium chalcedonicum*, but only in bud. However, there were some fine *Pterocephalus perennis* on the rocks and many yellow *Asphodeline liburnica*. The gorge is an impressive sight, the bottom filled with woods, from which rise sheer cliffs and the nerveless could walk beyond the viewpoint to a sheer drop of several hundred metres.



Down in Monodendri the little monastery at Paraskevi enjoys a similarly precarious position. The surrounding area also had some fine Ottoman bridges and near one we found the last flowers on *Lilium candidum*, some stands of *Acanthus balcanicus* and more *Himantoglossum caprinum*.

Day 5 5 July – Mount Flega

Our second day walk took us above the blue waters of Aoos Lake. The rough road led up into serpentine mountains past great swathes of *Alyssum corsicum* and into old growth *Pinus leucodermis* forest. Reaching 1900 metres we started our walk across open terrain quickly finding some pretty cushions of *Dianthus haematocalyx* subsp. *pindicola* on the stony ground. The low growing *Campanula tymphae* was abundant in the turf and there were pretty drifts of *Dianthus deltoides* and further on among some particularly immense pines the rocky ground was coloured yellow with *Helianthemum nummularium*. Some of the trees were very old though some area had clearly suffered fires with the amazing skeletal remains of the trees bleached silver-white. A steeper section got us up onto a ridge with superb views of the Pindos including 2600 metre Smolikas. It was up here that we found a relict population of *Lilium carniolicum* somehow surviving on the cooler ridge. There were many more, fine *Dianthus haematocalyx* subsp. *pindicola* too. Walking down we passed through another wonderful area of old trees with some amazing old specimens.

There was time to stop for a fantastic swathe of *Alcea rosea* growing along the roadside on the way back.

Day 6 6 July – To Mount Iti via Meteora

NB This has been added to this year's tour.

Meteora has a number of spectacularly positioned monasteries perched on huge domes of rock. And then coastal Mount Pilion gives us the chance to find *Campanula incurva*, one of the largest flowered species in Greece. Our hotel was at the foot of Mount Iti.



Himantoglossum caprinum

Day 7 7 July – Mount Vardousia

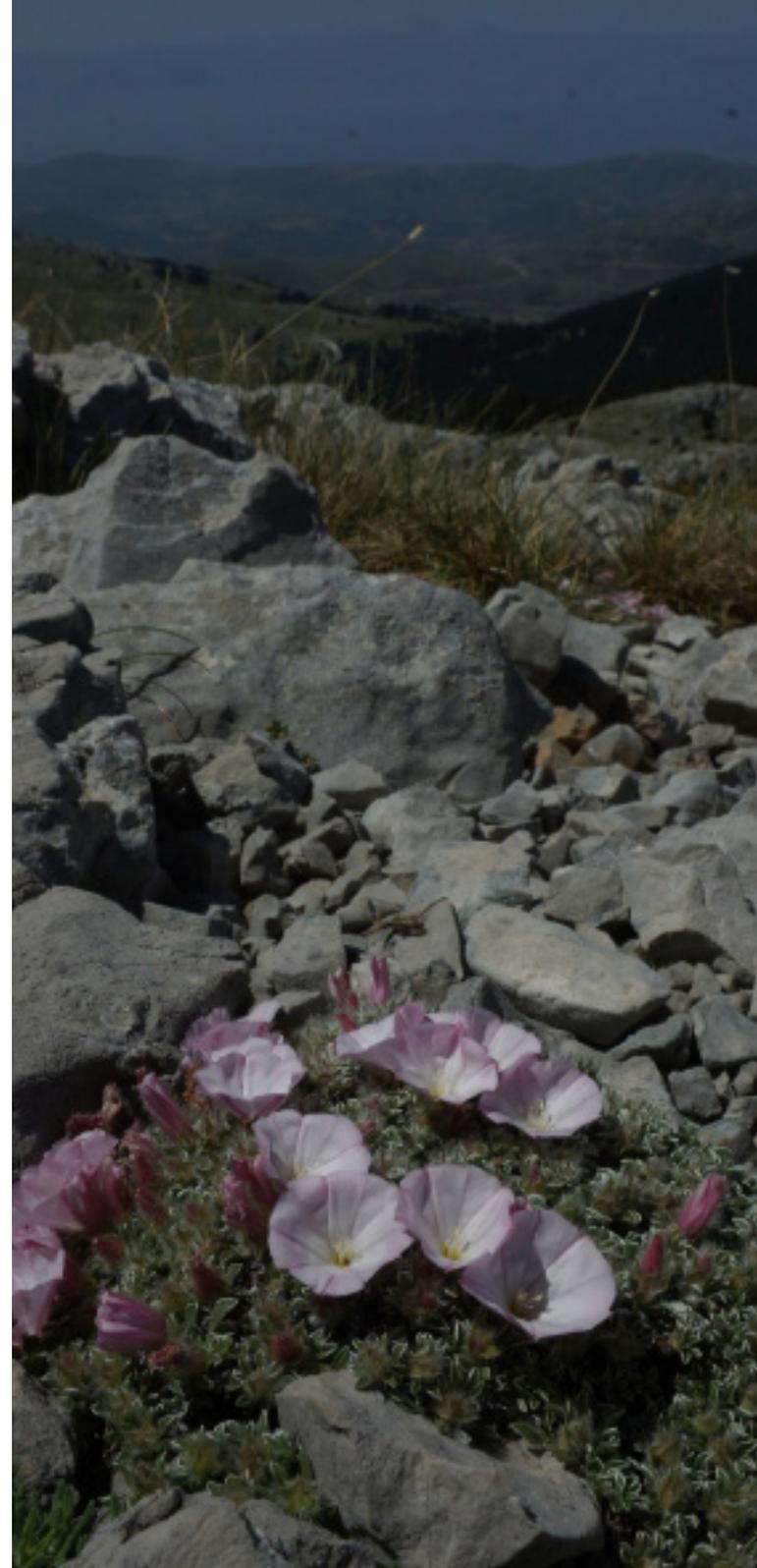
Greece is well endowed with wonderful winding mountain roads and today's drive followed one of them into stunning area of forests, deep valleys and rocky peaks. This isolates the various Pindos mountains sufficiently to allow endemics to evolve on a few or just one peak. An example of this is what we were after today. It took a while to find the right road up (sign posting is not a Greek strong point). Eventually we climbed on a good dirt road past superb stands of *Morina persica* to a remote mountain hut. From here a stiff hike up onto a rather rocky slope brought us to cliffs with fine cushions of *Minuartia stellata* and many *Campanula rupicola*. However, this was not what we were after and it took a bit more searching until we saw the first superb little spire of *Campanula columnaris*, a species confined to this one mountain. In fact, we need not have climbed so high, for although the ones on the cliffs were great there was actually a population on the rocky slope and rubble below.

From here we transferred across the mountains and onto towards our next peak, Mount Parnassos, eventually driving up into fir clad hills where a few *Lilium chalcedonicum* could be seen on a high bank among the woods. Our hotel was well positioned in the mountains with a welcoming indoor pool to ease the muscles after our hike.

Day 8 28 July – Mount Parnassos

The walking continued today with an exploration of Mount Parnassos, a florally rich limestone massif that reaches 2457 metres. It was possible to drive up to 1900 metres. From here we walked out across the limestone finding some big cushions of *Dianthus haematocalyx*, lovely tufts of *Acinos alpine*, neat flowery bushes of *Daphne oleaoides* and more big cushions of *Minuartia stellata* on the way. In a few localised spots on the right grade of rock grows one of Europe's loveliest alpinists. There spreading among the rocks was *Convolvulus boissieri*, the silvery mats peppered with little pink funnels.

Above us were even more jewels and we hiked up a stony ski slope with tight mats of *Asperula boissieri*. Reaching to ridge there was still snow in the corries and the rocks around had fine clumps of *Edrianthus graminifolius*, *Saxifraga sibthorpii*, trailing *Campanula rupicola*, mats of *Teucrium montanum* and *Lysimachia serpyfolia*. The only plant we couldn't find was *Campanula aizoides*, but surely it was here somewhere? It was easy to wander about the various ridges and find the best specimens, the temperature was perfect as the lands below clearly shimmered in summer heat and we were reluctant to descend.



Day 9 9 July – Mount Parnassos & Delphi

The morning was spent in the woods below the mountain where tall meadows had stands of mauve *Nepeta nuda* mingled beautifully with fine branched *Verbascum speciosum*, plentiful spires of *Cephalanthera rubra*, some pristine *Epipactis helleborine* and the peculiar pale yellow saprophytic *Monotropa uniflora*. Best of all though were the many sealing-wax red *Lilium chalcedonicum* that were freshly opened with plump anthers. This is arguably the most striking species of lily in the Europe and a fine way to wrap up the botany. After a pleasant amble in the woods it was time for a final picnic lunch.

The afternoon of the tour would be spent at the classical site of Delphi an hours drive away.

Day 10 10 July – Flights home

It was necessary to leave early to reach Athens in time for our flights home.



Lilium chalcedonicum



Verbascum speciosum & *Nepeta nuda*

For information on our tours
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