

A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE



Paeonia mascula



Cymbalaria longipes



Paracaryum lithospermifolium

Every cloud has a silver-lining and my enforced stay-at-home meant it was time to tick off the odd nagging ambition. The view from our house in the hills includes the soaring western ramparts of Tahtali Dag - a 2325-metre hulk of limestone that rises very abruptly from the azure Mediterranean Sea below. The dramatic eastern ridges are what we see, topped by layered cedars and all very enticing. Luckily for me another lockdown encumbent, Andrew, had plenty of experience scaling Tahtali from all sides and when he invited me to join him on a climb of the tantalising east ridge I was in.

Departure was 5.45 and by 6.00 we were walking, first to the scattered ruins of Laodakia our local Psidian site, and then more seriously up and onto the demanding limestone ridge. Here and there we needed climbing moves to get past awkward parts, not helped by the tough oak and juniper scrub. But, it was worth first with little gems such as *Cymbalaria longipes* growing in crevices and then with increasingly stunning views as we entered the Cedar of Lebanon forests that clad much of the





Anemone blanda



Lamium garganicum



Moltkia coerulea



Fritillaria crassifolia

peak. These majestic trees somehow manage to grow from the harsh, raw limestone ridges. Further up I found *Paracaryum lithospermifolium* and once we had finally huffed and puffed up to the top and traversed the austere but beautiful summit area there were the yellow bells of *Fritillaria carica*, *Ranunculus cadmica* and lovely clusters of blue *Anemone blanda* popping up between the stones. The rest of the route down was a breeze compared to the climb and back inside the cedar forest there were some stunning clumps of perfect *Paeonia mascula* to round off eighteen tough, but enjoyable kilometres.

Muscles were a little tight the next day, but not too bad. So, Basak and I drove around to the north side of the mountains, seeking out new locations and finding some wonderful plants. Patches of scree among another area of cedars had plenty of *Fritillaria crassifolia* and then turning towards the mountains remnant steppe patches had some flora more typical of Inner Anatolia, including the gorgeous blue *Moltkia coerulea*, a rather special borage, which grew with its yellow cousin *M. aurea* and the curious (and smelly) *Aristolochia auricularia*.

We also just had time to head into the foothills to an area of stony slopes peppered with lilac *Aubrieta deltoides*, pretty sprawling plants of *Lamium garganicum*, *Ornithogalum nutans* and the elegant silver spires of *Asphodeline taurica*, all in perfect flower and beautifully backlit with the late afternoon sun.

Now it was back to young boys eager to wrestle with their dad and test those already aching muscles!



Aristolochia auricularia



Asphodeline taurica

