ARUNACHAL PRADESH UNDISCOVERED INDIA TRIP REPORT 2026

viranatura tours



Pleione hookeriana

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Day 1 To India (16 June)

Everyone arrived from various points, south, west and even further west of India and the warm and humid city of Guwahati. Most had the chance to clean up and refresh at a hotel for a couple of hours before a leisurely lunch and then off into the maelstrom of Indian traffic. Especially gnarly parts forced us to take a 'short cut' to circumvent the worst, whether it saved time we'll never know, but not long after we were beginning our gradual climb into the lush green hills of Megalahaya. It was a slow journey, there is simply no other way of travelling in this part of the country, but there were plants of white-bracted *Mussaenda roxburghii* hangning out from the banks and as we drew closer to Jowai we did start to see the impressive *Hedychium ellipticum* and clumps of slenderer *H. spicatum*.

An early night was had by all.

Day 2 Khasia Hills (17 June)

Not unexpectedly it was raining a little first thing, but we were only two hours away from the wettest place on Earth. That said, it had eased by the time we left driving into the undulating landscape of patchy forests and pasture. The first stop was for our first *Nepenthes khasiana* hanging from a roadside bank and many more were to follow. A flowering *Ophiopogon planiscapus* and a deep pink *Impatiens sinensis* grew with it and the latter turned up again a little further on where it grew with a second pink species; *Impatiens balsamina* (with wider leaves and a shorter spur) Spikes of the pink orchid *Brachycorytis obcordata* were in the grassy areas and on the rocks was a small colony of *Drosera peltata*. The rain was beginning to increase, but we were all prepared with brollies and wellies so there was no problem venturing out to look at a much more extensive colony of *Nepenthes khasiana*, with many large plants sprawled across rocky outcrops with pitchers in all stages of development and many slender flower spikes. The peculiar rayless daisy grew in the wet depressions too. the pitcher plants were very impressive, and we could see many more hanging from roadside banks as we drove, even some scrambling into trees. Another stop produced the unusual *Burmannia disticha* alongside many more *Drosera peltata* before we made to the start of a waterfall walk. After a quick cup of tea we set off for the easy ten-minute wander to the falls, though the flora was much more interesting with the fuzzy heads of *Impatiens bracteata*,

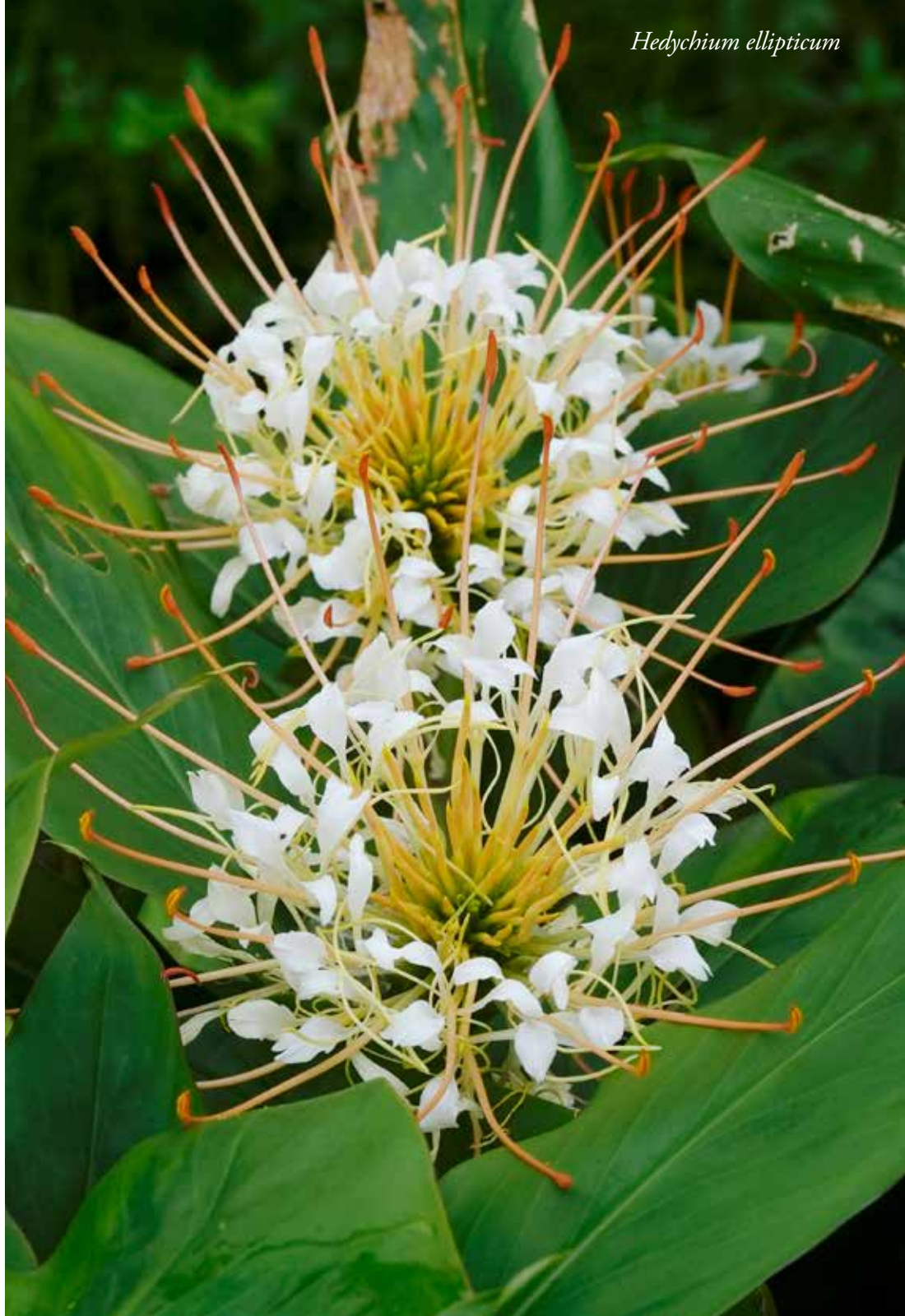


Nepenthes khasiana

a larger yellow *I. sp*, the purple of *Strobilanthes sp*, *Scutellaria discolor*, the slender spikes of *Cautleya gracilis* and a *Rhynchostylis retusa* flowering high in tree. There was the chance to eat some delicious fresh pineapple on the return and then we started our way towards Jowai for lunch. A lunch date that would be late since we just had to stop one more time for *Nepenthes khasiana*, finding a mixed population with some hanging elegantly against rockfaces and other strongly climbing into the trees of a forest patch with another *Rhynchostylis retusa* nearby and the architectural *Brassaiopsis* sp. flanking a small stream. The former is an adaptable plant, essential one of forests where it can climb several metres into trees, but when the trees are removed is able to still grow on barren open ground.

Now we made tracks to lunch, which in a cute car themed little café/ restaurant, with half a red mini poised on the roof. We still had to fit in a visit to the Nartiang monoliths so turned off and cut though a village of colourfully painted houses. Of course, it was not possible to drive straight there and there was an interesting stop in a forest patch for the tall spathes of *Amorphothallus nepalensis* growing clumps of showy *Hedychium spicatum*. A second ginger species was here too; the showy *Curcuma aromatica* and Joan found a perfect spike at the base of one plant. More subtle were the *Disporum cantoniense* scattered about as well as lots more *Scutellaria discolor*. Yet another balsam; *Impatiens officinalis* was found! Moving on the monoliths, we spent half an hour looking around the large collections of organically arranged stones, with a big variety of size, some tall slender uprights and many broad flat horizontal slabs. A clump of *Hedychium ellipticum* grew epiphytically and there was plenty of activity below as the locals planted their rice paddy. By now we were already late, but it didn't prevent one more stop for a fine population of *Hedychium ellipticum* growing on low cliffs, each hefty clump topped by exotic plumes of flowers. Alongside was also a cluster of pretty peach-pink *Coelogyne articulata* to complete the day's botany.

The remaining trundle in Shillong took a ridiculously long time given the distance involved, but there simply is no way of exploring this intriguing area quickly and no doubt there was plenty more we didn't find. There was a fine sunset sky as we approached.



Hedychium ellipticum

Day 3 To Bhalukpong (18 June)

Getting from A to B in this corner of the world is seldom a swift process and we had to now switch states and move from Megalahaya to Arunachal Pradesh (or least very close to it). There was a morning walk around the convoluted and congested market where all manner of goods from fabulous piles of chillies to Indian billhooks, colourful local bags or second-hand socks piled up with porters weaving their way through the narrow alleyways (already half filled with dozens of metal water pipes) with heavy loads of vegetables. It was raining a little and umbrellas only added to the mix, especially if you were taller and had to dodge low-flying brollies as you walked. Exiting the market, we made our way to the cars alongside the congested streets filled with traffic which somehow kept moving despite the chaos. Now we drove descending on a winding road down and down, the vegetation gradually transitioning from sub-tropical to tropical the bamboos growing larger and the bananas appearing alongside the coconuts. Once down on the plains the road improved and progress was good, passing by floriferous trees of *Cassia fistula* and flanked by flooded fields and plantations filled with egrets.

After a good lunch we drove the next leg, passing through the similar landscapes, crossing the wide waters of the Brahmaputra and then stopping for a (very slow) cuppa before continuing. It was near here that we had our solitary plant stop for a stand of flowering *Calotropis gigantea*, an exotic-looking asclepiad (though that now should be apocynid). Gnarly traffic got us past the slowest bypass construction in India and then on into the last stretch of countryside with a heavy downpour sweeping in that had fortunately ended by the time we reached the large cottages we were to stay in tonight. Evening was setting in and the day shift of cicadas moved over to the night shift crickets, the wailing shifting to chirping.

Day 4 To Dirang (19 June)

The warmth and humidity of the lowlands was at a pleasant level first thing in the morning and in the gardens was a slim tree supporting a large plant of *Cymbidium aloifolium* with long flower spikes hanging down and exotic butterflies glided in and fed from *Ixora* flowers. Finally entering Arunachal



Calotropis gigantea

Pradesh, we very soon started to climb on a road that was rarely straight, making several stops for the lush subtropical flora that slowly transitioned to a temperate one. First up was a few *Arundina graminifolia*, the showy pink flowers topping tall canes, followed by stands of pink *Impatiens tripetala* along the roadside where an unusual shrubby vine hung down in places; *Leea asiatica*. The white flowers of *Thunbergia grandiflora* dangled on long stems beside a small waterfall and just around the corner was a fabulous foliage display of *Colocasia affinis* plastering shaded wet rocks alongside the broad leaves of *Amorphothallus* with marble stems. Leaving the subtropics we ascended and then stopped beside a steep vegetated slope where we could see a *Hoya vaccinioides* and then a cane of *Dendrobium devonianum* with many beautiful flowers, albeit a bit out of reach unless one had a telephoto lens. A pretty unidentified gesneriad was also here. Moving on a bit there came a wonderful display of epiphytic orchids with many ivory tumbles of *Coelogyne nitida* scattered along the mossy branches of a few exposed trees with sweeping misty forest backdrops beyond. One or two big clumps were quite a bit closer to the road too and it was a delightful example of how epiphytic orchids grow. On the nearby steep banks behind were also a couple more even better (and closer) *Dendrobium devonianum* too.

Lunch in a drier valley dominated by pines followed before we ascended to misty heights and stopped for a few *Rhododendron maddenii* with pink tinged white trumpets. More of these could be seen closer at a small shrine where there was also our first elegant spire of *Cardiocrinum giganteum* subsp. *yunnanense*. Always an impressive sight, more were found in the next two side valleys as we descended, including one majestic spike growing in the open pasture among the big leaves of *Arisaema speciosa*. Another rocky bank held a few *Vanda undulata* and in shadier nooks hung the unusual *Rhododendron vaccinioides* with small waxy white flowers. Its heftier cousin R. maddenii was just a few metres away to give a sharp comparison of variation within the genus.

It wasn't too far from here to Dirang and after a quick stop at the off licence we arrived at our hotel poised above the valley.



Coelogyne nitida

Day 5 Mandala (20 June)

Blue sky and warm sunshine meant early optimism as we set off taking a side road and continuing through a mixture of forest patches and ever-expanding cabbage fields. A good group of *Arisaema concinnum* grew in the shade with the large leaves of *Brassaiopsis palmata* nearby and a little further on we found *A. consanguineum*, both species with attractive spoke-like foliage. It seemed the season was a touch early and we took a while to find the beautiful *Dendrobium falconeri* growing near an unusual small fern; *Pyrrosia*. Ferns were very much a feature of the day with many fine species seen with everything from dainty *Asplenium* to hefty *Woodwardia* or huge shuttlecocks of *Dryopteris wallichiana* and dense basket ferns; *Drynaria propinqua* crowding the branches of trees. A magnificent tree of *Cornus capitata* was next, easily the largest any of us had seen with a thick trunk and thousands of creamy-bracted flowers. Then tucked in a shady bank was *Coelogyne corymbosa* with a few more clustered on the branches of a nearby tree. In the sun further along was showy *Roscoea megalantha* and *Nicandra physalodes* too. We made stops for *Agapetes incurvata*, *Pyrola rotundifolia* and the lovely *Primula mollis*. The latter grew in the lee of shrubs such as climbing (hairy stemmed) *Actinida strigosa*, almost next to related (smooth-stemmed) *A. callosa* with a huge specimen of *Hydrangea heteromalla* nearby. We had also started to see the spires of *Cardiocrinum giganteum*, but alas they were all in tight bud, but *Rhododendron keysii* was in good flower.

Gaining height, the air cooled a little as we hit the rhododendron belt, with the impressive large foliage of *Rhododendron kesangiae* and the bristly new growth on *R. barbatum*. Beneath these grew the dainty bells of *Streptopus simplex* and the equally delicate *Ainsliaea aptera*. Lunch was in a small wooden tea house and by now the mists had well and truly swirled in with the battered silver firs ghostly silhouettes. An unidentifiable *Arisaema* grew near some stupas and from here we slowly followed the road trying to spot interesting plants. A population of *Magnolia globosa* was found, and though they had a good number of flowers on they were a bit distant on the steep slope below. Large-flowered forms of *Clematis montana* were draped from banks, trees and shrubs and we stopped for one area where they entangled with *Rhododendron keysii* as a green-tailed sunbird zipped



Magnolia globosa

about the shrubbery. Turning around, we then found a much more accessible tree of *Magnolia globosa* and with a bit of teamwork involving hooking branches out of the way of a steep muddy slope, John and I managed to photograph the interior of the crisp white flowers. After a while we left the mists behind and it was clear when we stopped for a tuft of *Cautleya gracilis* growing in a tree stump but soon swept in agºain as we wound our way down into the valley, stopping one last time for a bank of the handsome *Woodwardia* sp.

The red sauce at dinner was fiery!

Day 6 To Jang via Sela Pass (21 June)

Today we moved onto to higher parts of the state, following the river valley north and steadily climbing into lusher, greener hills with the occasional clear view of distant ridges. A roadside boulder was dressed in hundreds of crinkled rosettes of *Corallodiscus lanuginosus* most with a dainty pale lilac flower that quivered in the slightest breeze. Various ferns grew with these and the diversity of these continued to amaze with several more species at our next stop for another rock, this time supporting many showy *Roscoea megalantha*. Vyeing for space of the rock face with a blackish-green fern; *Hermionitis* sp. were two species of *Dictocarpus* with attractive foliage. Yet more species of fern such as fine leaved *Odontosoria chinensis*, the slender upright fingers of *Lepisoria mehrae* and broad hanging leaves of *Oleandra wallichii* grew alongside the deep-veined foliage of one of the many *Boehmeria* species, with the bright yellow of *Cautleya gracilis* bursting from among coppery ferns and above it all was a large flowering epiphytic plant of *Rhododendron maddenii* (its cousin and neighbour *R. dalhousiae* had sadly finished flowering this season). A second boulder smothered in even more *Corallodiscus lanuginosus* followed, with a spike of *Cardiocrinum giganteum* on the bank above and the first spikes of *Pedicularis rex* with whorls of feathery leaves and yellow flowers. Then it all got very interesting after we stopped for another fine *Cardiocrinum giganteum* and John spotted "some red flowers". They weren't actually red, but instead the deep pink of *Primula mollis* and following the track into the bamboo and forest we found an idyllic dell filled with these handsome leafy herbs growing beneath a dozen or more superb *Cardiocrinum giganteum*. One more rock brimming with *Roscoea megalantha* followed and then we drove the last few curves to our lunch in an army café.



Rhododendron cinnabarinum

After eating too much cake, we set off again, climbing steadily and turning off onto the quieter side road to the Sela Pass. The first flowers of *Meconopsis paniculata* could be seen, but we ignored these and carried on to a bush of *Rhododendron cinnabarinum* laden in orange bells. A walk along the road produced a succession of interesting flora from delicate sedges to emerald *Malaxis muscifera* orchids with tiny green flowers, the deep magenta forms of *Rhododendron lepidotum*, abundant *Rosa sericea* with nodding creamy flowers and more orchids with *Oreorchis foliosa* and patches of *Galearis spathulata*. It was near the latter that we also found an even smaller orchid, *Peristylus* sp growing on banks with the creeping willow; *Salix calyculata* and the occasional tuft of *Cassiope fastigiata*. The mists swirled in and out as we continued but the parted enough for us to enjoy the many *Bistorta griffithii* with arching spikes of pink, mats of *Gypsophila cerastoides*, the fast developing shuttlecocks of *Dryopteris barbigera* covered in rusty scales and a pretty *Androsace* sp. growing in the mosses that encrusted many of the boulders. The developing woolly heads of *Cirsium eriophoroides* with drenched in droplets of water and the rain did eventually arrive near the top of the pass, but we still managed to stop for amazing hummocks of *Cassiope selaginoides* smothered in white bells with tufts of *Bistorta griffithii* bursting out of them or clumps of *Potentilla contigua* and then again for a population of *Meconopsis merakensis* growing on a slope with various colour forms of *Rhododendron lepidotum*. The pass was tantalising the ground swathed in countless yellow *Primula dickeana*, *Rhododendron setosum* and the big bells of *Swertia grandiflora*, but this would all have to wait for another day as we had to descend through slopes with flowering rhododendrons, *Meconopsis paniculata* and more, stopping only for a fabulous mossy boulder peppered with dozens of *Pleione hookeriana*.

Day 7 Jang (22 June)

A diverse plant day began just below the hotel where *Rhododendron dalhousiae* var. *rhabdotum* was in superb flower, the huge trumpets striped with red and glowing in the sun. The fern; *Selliguea lehmannii* grew beneath. It was a clear morning with some blue sky and good views along the steep sided forested valley punctuated with colourful villages. Turning onto a quieter side road the thickly vegetated slopes held a wide variety of woody plants, ferns and herbs and we stopped first for a few *Hydrangea serrata* in flower with *Philadelphus tomentosa* and the orangey spathes of *Colocasia esculenta* nearby and wandering along the track



Rhododendron dalhousiae var. *rhabdotum*

we found many fresh *Arisaema tortuosum*, the graceful tall fern *Pteris wallichiana* and the hanging branches of *Polygala arillata* with golden flowers, the lip tipped with red. Another superb *Rhododendron dalhousiae* var. *rhabdotum* was found, this one with a truss of six perfect flowers. A little higher up was a pasture with many *Roscoea purpurea* and clumps of *Euphorbia sikkimensis*, with contended cow/yaks/dzos munching away. The road continued to snake upwards, and we continued to find good plants with next the peculiar Dutchman's pipes of *Aristolochia griffithii*, followed by a very close *Magnolia globosa* with a pristine flower well within reach, whilst a more distant epiphytic Araliaceae was more distant. Another choice shrub followed; *Buddleja colvillei* with gorgeous pendent spikes of cerise flowers. By now we were getting better views of the forested ridges as the mists ebbed and flowed through them and soon, we would be up among them. Not before we stopped for another wonderful population of the lovely *Pleione hookeriana*, with many scattered across mossy boulders and among ferns. A flowering plant of *Rhododendron camelliiflora* was also with them. Pushing on we entered the *Abies spectabilis* forests and then stopped by a wet slope with several towering specimens of *Meconopsis paniculata* in various stages of flowering. Below them was the ever so delicate *Primula prenantha*.

There were many atmospheric misty views of silhouetted firs and lunch was next to a thundering waterfall set among them. Afterwards we took a walk to the smaller fall finding some interesting plants on the wet cliffs including what may be *Cypripedium elegans*. The road went on up through forests of fir and *Rhododendron hodgsonii* with their smooth tan and alabaster trunks, the understorey thickly blanketed in mosses. Another pasture had quite a few *Primula dickeana* and then a little further on was a good flowering bush of *Rhododendron wallichii* beneath which grew a few bushes of pink *R. anthopogon* and a deep purple *Anemone* sp. Until now we had dodged the rain but a heavy shower swept in and we had to abandon any further wandering until much lower down where a plant of *Henkelia urticifolia* was on a mossy rock and the adjacent slope had lots of dainty *Corydalis leptocarpum*. And there was a final stop for an especially good shrub of *Hydrangea serrata* decked with many bluish corymbs of flower as well as the final few red bells of *Rhododendron neriiflorum*.

We arrived back with enough time for a coffee boost.



Pleione hookeriana

Day 8 Sela Top (23 June)

After several days of acclimatising, it was time to head up to the heights of Sela Pass, so we began the climb back up from Jang, stopping for a botanical ten minutes (half an hour) on the way to look at the wonderful display on the *Pleione hookeriana* rock in better weather. Botanical cats that we are we all went in different directions finding plentiful little *Arisaema jacquemontii*, the pendant spikes of purple *Maianthemum purpureum*, *Rhododendron baileyi* with a few flowers, the marbled leaves of *Podophyllum hexandrum*, *Pilea ternifolia* and as ever a diverse array of ferns from *Selliguea malacodon* to delightful hanging filmy ferns; *Hymenophyllum tenellum* and a luxuriant curtain of *Goniophlebium* sp cascading from a mossy boulder. The weather was still good (at our elevation) so we drove on towards the pass, whereby the mist rolled in and we continued driving in a 'peasouper', the landscape occasionally opening until we reached our destination. All seemed fog-bound but not long after we had arrived the amorphous mists parted, and we could see the rugged rocky landscape and silvered alpine tarn below. There followed a very productive walk, first down past tumbles of boulders than held violet *Primula gambleana* growing among lurid pink *Rhododendron anthopogon*, the yellow bells of *Lloydia flavonutans*, *Anemone rupestris* and pretty clumps of tiny *Primula glabra*. Tight mats of *Diapensis himalaica* grew on the rocks as did mats of *Potentilla microphylla* and then colouring a rocky 'staircase' were many gorgeous cerise *Primula jonardunii*. The rocks gave way to alpine turf which was swathed in countless *Primula dickieana* among which grew many *P. glabra*, *Pegaeophyton scapiflorum* and the tiny carrot; *Acronema minus*. The cloud came and went as we explored but then it let loose a heavy shower just as we had climbed up for a late flower of *Primula strumosa*. It abated after twenty minutes allowing some more photos of the flowery rock terraces, just giving us tome to reach the cars before it started again.

Lunch was in the car, but the team still managed to serve us hot coffee in the rain. It has eased by the time we had driven back to the pass stopping just below from where we spent a good amount of time exploring a slope of boulder strewn alpine turf. Here we found the fantastic and complex spires of *Swertia grandiflora*, an impressive alpine with red and yellow striped flowers. with these were a few *Meconopsis simplicifolia*, *Cassiope fastigiata* laden with snow white bells, whilst Josh also found a lovely purple bell of *Lilium nanum*. Moving higher the rocky



Goniophlebium sp.

rhododendron clad slope had a few *Meconopsis merakensis*, mats of *Chesneya nubigena* and the odd *Cyananthus flavus*. Higher still and there were more good *Swertia grandiflora* and an architectural *Megacodon stylophorum* with two perfect green bells growing close to a ruby red *Rhodiola fastigiata*. A yak wandered down from higher up and spent a few minutes eyeing us up before snorting and moving off to bellow from a ledge. We thought it better to avoid any more yaks and took a different route via some flowering *Rhododendron bhutanense*. Then we came upon Christopher who had a found a colony of the very delicate *Primula jigmediana* with pretty dark centre lilac flowers. A plant of *Veratrilla baillonii* was also found. There was time for a quick coffee and chocolate boost before setting off again, first exploring a slope with lots of *Rhododendron setosum* and a few *Swertia grandiflora* and then a lot lower down we stopped and admired the beautiful *Meconopsis gakyidiana*. The adjacent stream was flanked by the golden-brown fiddle heads of emerging ferns and tall *Meconopsis paniculata*. And, alongside the larger river we found the diminutive (nearly open) bells of *Codonopsis foetans* and a rock bristling with *Acanthocalyx nepalensis*.

Back at base the team quickly rustled up coffee and samosas.

Day 9 Jang Side Valley (24 June)

Visiting the Himalayas without a good walk seems a waste, so today was our opportunity to get into those wonderful hills on foot. Views of snowy Gonchen South as we drove up boded well for the day and indeed the weather overall was good (for monsoon season). A rushing cascade strung with multicoloured prayer flags marked the start of our foray, climbing up into the virgin silver fir forests, the trail steep at first before easing as we made our way past mossy boulders with *Arisaema elephas* growing on top, myriad ferns and postcard views of rushing streams. Occasional *Primula gambleana* were found in good condition and open areas had other primulas, rhododendrons, slender purple *Corydalis flaccida* and many fast-developing *Meconopsis paniculata* with superb views along the forested valley. Fire tailed sunbird called from a high perch and a pair of blood pheasants with chicks were seen well in the woods before we got our first experience of the piece-de-resistance of this walk; its large population of *Meconopsis gakyidiana*, arguably the finest of all blue poppies and with these iconic and beautiful flowers, which varied in colour from sky blue to violet and everything in between. We found with them *Pedicularis roylei*, fruiting *Podophyllum hexandrum*, *Primula waltonii* and many *Galearis*



Swertia grandiflora

spathulatus. Continuing through the forest we arrived at a larger pasture flanked by sheer grey walls with a waterfall streaking down the head of the valley. Here were many more stunning *Meconopsis gakyidiana* alongside their cousin *M. paniculata*. Both beautiful and dark-breasted rosefinches were busy around the yak herders hut when we arrived and since rain was threatening, we ate lunch quickly and then donned waterproofs, setting off further along the track through abundant *Primula dickieana* and more stands of beautiful blue poppies. The rain was short lived, and we found *Swertia hookeriana*, pallid *Primula alpicola* and a few *Podophyllum hexandrum* in flower before reaching the viewpoint of the waterfall. *Lilium nanum* was also here as was *Megacodon stylophorum* with quite a few of the latter scattered throughout the trail though invariably sprouting from unreachable mossy boulders.

Walking back, we picked up *Phlomis tibetica*, *Clematis tongolensis* strung across the shrubs and whatever else took our fancy, most of us dodging the rain until we reached the end of a rewarding and scenic walk in an unspoiled part of the Himalayas.

Day 10 To Tawang (25 June)

A slower paced day after yesterday's exertions that took us via a back road to Tawang. As ever there were many stops along the beginning with *Impatiens arguta*, then *Euphorbia sikkimensis* which grew at the base of a well vegetated bank that also had an attractive *Rubus* sp. a dainty *Thalictrum* sp. and around the corner a wonderful cascade of big-leaved *Gleichenia gigantea*. Ferns were ever present, and we stopped next for a handsome species of *Dennstaedtia* with fine-cut leaves. Crossing a bridge, we started up the other side of the valley and found a flowering *Therapogon pallidus* on a cliff, followed by our first *Iris decora*. More of the latter were found further up where we also had a good view of the triple step waterfall that plunged down from the forested heights. Just beyond this was a colony of *Corallodiscus lanuginosus* with extra-crinkly leaves growing with various ferns and a spiny-leaved *Rosa* sp. The views along the valley were stunning and we took a short walk along one section of the road finding the round leaves of *Bergenia ciliata*, *Pedicularis rex* and its hemiparasitic cousin *Lindenbergia muroria* growing in the rock crevices. Other flowers included *Roscoea auriculata*, *Deutzia glomerata* and high on the banks a few *Notholirion*



Meconopsis gakyidiana

macrophyllum. Beside a small water prayer wheel *Rhododendron neriiflorum* was in flower and just beyond a landslip a colony of wild bees was building its hive. The flora of the cliffs and rock faces was diverse with abundant ferns, various *Pilea* species and in a couple of places the ruby-red *Didymocarpos aromaticus*.

Time had moved on and we now completed the final stretch to Tawang, arriving a bit late for lunch. once fed we then took in the handicrafts markets and paid a visit to the large 18th century monastery that dominates the town and was where the current Dali Lama first arrived at when he fled from the Chinese. Plenty of monks of various ages were walking about the courtyard and there was time to look around the very colourful interior of the main prayer and enjoy the views across the town before walking down through the monastery complex with its many prayer wheels some bigger than others.

Day 11 Tawang (26 June)

It was a fine sunny morning, indeed the rooms (and those of us with balconies) were positively toasty once the sun had risen. Bearing in mind the good weather and the speed at which it changes here, we drove directly to the start of our walk. A narrow track took us higher, but with distractions along the way including *Fritillaria crassicaulis*, *Lloydia flavonutans* and then the first of many fresh *Primula wattii*. Primula were to be a mainstay of the day with twelve species seen. A stream ran to our left and this was lined by *Rhododendron bhutanensis* as well as the odd *R. wightii* still in flower and clumps of *Chrysoplenium forrestii*. A one point we flush a male Himalayan monal which flew downstream. Reaching a broad pasture there were many *Primula dickieana* on the wet terraces and the rich purple of the last *P. calderiana*. Climbing higher we reached an area of moss-covered boulders, the habitat of two tiny jewels: *Primula jigmediana* and *P. sapphirina* together with a third miniature; *P. glabra*, though this was a giant by comparison. Crossing a rocky slope, we found a superb *Mandragora caulescens* with fresh violet-tinged flowers and just beyond was a colony of *Primula atrodentata*. Higher on the cliffs we could see clumps of white *Anemonastrum polyanthes* and it was possible to climb up and get close to these, with dozens of *P. sapphirina* scattered in the turf below. Once we had again reached the road, there was a stunning male fire-tailed sunbird. We then walked a short distance further and managed to find the dainty blue poppy; *Meconopsis ludlowii* on a mossy bank.



Primula waltonii

Lunch followed and then we made a series of productive stops on the return journey first for a fine cascade of *Clematis tongluensis* sprawled across a number hillside shrubs with hundreds of flowers. There were then two stops for wonderful specimens of *Megacodon stylophorum* that grew on steep mossy banks on the edge of the woods allowing a easy view of the green spotted interior of the big waxen bells. Fine spires of *Meconopsis paniculata* also grew nearby as well as at our next stop, though these was augmented by more beautiful *M. gakyidiana*. Near the latter was also found a good clump of *Primula waltonii* (and a nearly open *P. capitata*), which itself featured again a bit further down when we stopped in primula heaven. Here were hundreds of soft yellow *Primula sikkimensis*, punctuated by *P. waltonii* and more noticeably by several towering *Meconopsis paniculata*, everything laced throughout with blue *Myosotis* creating a beguiling meadow. More *Megacodon stylophorum*, pretty *Saxifraga melanocentra*, a trailing *Lysimachia prolifera* and the blue cones of *Abies spectabilis* added a little extra. Moving on there was yet another atmospheric view of silhouetted ridges lined with architectural firs before we found a dense stand of *Primula prolifera* filling a little dell among firs and rhododendrons, the flowers fresh and in a series of whorls on tall stems. Another pair of yellow flowers completed the day, firstly *Salvia campanulata* and then *Cathcartia villosa*, with nodding yellow flowers above lovely, scalloped leaves.

And it didn't rain all day.

Day 12 Tawang (27 June)

Taking a different road up we drove directly to an area of mossy boulders and rhododendron scrub, which had a good variety of plants beginning with the green-black flowers of *Veratrilla baillonii*, followed soon after by the first good scapes of *Primula obliqua*. These grew among an understorey dominated by the leafy masses of *Bistorta griffithii* with their curled pink spikes scattered throughout. The rocky areas had *Lilium nanum*, pendant spikes of *Maianthemum purpureum*, delicate sedges, many ferns and a fast-developing umbel of *Hymenidium benthamii*. *Salvia campanulata* was also in flower and several of the many *Swertia splendens* were in advanced bud. Moving on to a lake we stopped by the entrance for an especially



Megacodon stylophorum

good clump of *Primula obliqua* nestled beneath rhododendrons with the mist drifting through. Indeed, the mist almost completely obscured the lake, and we could barely see the waters at all. Through the murk we did manage to find a decent late truss on *Rhododendron wightii* and in the wet margins was plenty of *Pegaeophyton scapiflorum* and *Primula dickieana*, whilst a smaller pond had *Cassiope fastigiata* around the edge. *Swertia splendens* was here too but though these were tantalisingly close to opening, we could not find any in flower.



Cathcartia villosa

The plan had been to continue to another smaller lake an explore adjacent slopes and though all seemed well with the army at first, we had only gone a short way when the brigadier of great importance turned up. We did at least get to photograph a few things including *Trollius pumilis*, *Anemone demissa* and an attractive mauve brassica before we reluctantly had to leave the area and return to the first lake for lunch. The local dogs patiently waited for the leftovers or engaged in making more dogs while we ate. Unfortunately, our day was going to be rather shorter than planned but, on the descent, we made stops for a thriving population of *Cathcartia villosa* with some good fresh flowers and leaves sparkling with water drops from the mist. Another stop had the hefty plants of *Arisaema anatinum* and large *A. elephas* and floriferous shrubs of *Berberis aristata* with a final stop for a flowering *Rhododendron neriiflorum* before reaching the huge and colourful Buddha statue poised above the town. After looking around this a relaxing to the melodic chanting that was playing, we returned to the hotel for coffee and relaxation (or did some extra shopping in town).

Day 13 To Dirang via Sela Pass (28 June)

Our gradual exit from Arunachal Pradesh began, descending from Tawang (with a short delay for a flat tyre) and then back up to Jang and the road to the Sela Pass. There were stops for the dense stands of *Osmunda claytonia interupta* on the slopes before we wound our way up to the top. There was a cool wind blowing as we set off, but this was at least keeping any rain away. A boulder strewn slope had a superb specimen of *Meconopsis simplicifolia* with four crisp flowers and its cousin *M. merakensis* grew nearby together with *Swertia grandiflora*. Moving on we followed the wide track seeing a rosette of *Soroseris* sp and then on to an area of cliffs which were largely sheltered from the gusts. A wet seep had several of the very delicate *Corydalis ecristata* dangling from the rocks with long-spurred ice blue flowers. some grew among the hanging foliage of *Meconopsis bella* and at first it seemed as though we would miss this species. However, a little further along one was growing on a cliff with two blue flowers. The only rub was it was a bit high up. A stream cascades over the granite rocks and here there were many more *Corydalis ecristata* as well as a Gould's shortwing with a chick, which rushed back and forth. A lammergeier also soared out overhead. There was one last plant to find and nestled in the shade of some boulders was the unusual *Scrophularia wattii* with crinkled leaves and bright yellow flowers. By now the wind had eased and it was much warmer. Even better the views were crystal clear across the densely forested ridges, and we could see much of the terrain we had previously explored in the mist. Walking back there were tufts of *Bistorta griffithii* and the woolly heads of *Cirsium eriocephaloides* clinging to the rocky slopes with the towering cliff beyond.

Lunch was in an army café and then we made our way down, stopping for *Cassiope selaginoides* hummocks and more stunning views of the distant hills and back up to the Sela Pass framed with the now very familiar forms of Abies spectabilis. There was also a temperature inversion and the views we across a cloud sea, which we subsequently dived into and then out of, now with the cloud above. There was a final stop for probably one of the last *Cardiocrinum giganteum* in flower and then it was onto Dirang and a very good dinner in town.



Corydalis ecristata

Day 14 To Tezpur (29 June)

The slow exit from Arunachal continued today, pausing first for a quick look at the settlement in the dzong (fort), where buildings are mainly in a well-kept traditional style. There was also the bonus of a service taking place in the temple building with resonant chants gently drifting out. There was nothing of note until we reached lunch in a small restaurant, but the afternoon was more eventful. After a stop at a small temple perched on a rock with good views along the valley and the big knobbly red fruits on architectural *Pandanus* we drove on through some very thick mist, finally stopping once it was clear to spend a short time looking at a steep bank which was plastered in many different ferns including; *Pyrrosia flocculosa*, *Microsorum membranaceum* and *Davaliodes membranulosa* as well as a flowering plant of fiery red *Aeschyanthus lineatus*. Not that far beyond this and we stopped again for a population of the beautiful *Rhynchoglossum ampliatum* that smothered a seep in its lush foliage and large mauve flowers. various other plants were in the same area, with a *Begonia* sp. and a shrub with dangling white flowers and there was an overriding tropical lushness to it all with palms and tree ferns punctuating the wall of green.

The final stretch across the lowlands took us back into Assam and into the comforts of our hotel with good showers and a final good meal.

Day 15 To Guwahati (30 June)

Distances may look small on the map, but travel in India is not fast and we left in good time for the airport trundling through the green lowlands with paddy fields, palms and a swollen Bramaputra. The contrast with where we had just been stark, but that's what makes places special. Lunch was on the way and then the remaining stretch the took us through the gnarly city traffic to the airport for various flights to various places. I was off to New Guinea via Singapore for the next leg of an Asian marathon. Hopefully I wouldn't have to wear a gourd!



Rhynchoglossum ampliatum



Cardiocrinum giganteum

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