

viranatura
tours 

CHILE'S
FLOWERING DESERT
2025

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Cistanthe longiscapa

Day 1 **5 Oct To Ovalle, Chile**

Most of us had arrived a day in advance and we all met up at the airport for the remaining members of the group, some enjoying a welcome pisco sour. On our way we drove north through much greener hills than at other seasons, the straggly *Acacia caven* covered in golden flowers filled the rank open scrub and rockier slopes with native matorral had big populations of *Puya x bertroniana*, silver leaved *P. coerulea* and the upright columns of *Leucostele chiloensis*. The indented coast had many lovely bays and sweeps of sand and after a couple of hours we reached an area of coastal matorral where we had the chance to explore for plants. In between the many shrubs of *Lithraea caustica* was plenty of rich blue *Pasithea coerulea* and the fresh green grassy ground was studded with countless yellow *Sisyrinchium graminifolium* and *Oziroë bifolia*. Standing tall of this were many of the remarkable *Bipinnula fimbriata* each flower with much divided green sepals. A second orchid, *Chloraea galeata* was also found close to a *Leucostele chiloensis* with a few very large white flowers. Vivid pink *Oxalis arenaria*, a *Stachys* sp., hefty clumps of golden *Calceolaria corymbosa*, the climbing stems of *Tropaeolum hookerianum* and the trailing stems of *Tweedia birostris*, pretty *Moninnia pterocarpa* were all found along with tufts of ferns enjoying this season's extra moisture too with both *Adiantum chilensis* and *Cheilanthes hypoleuca*. A few *Leucocoryne coquimbensis* were a bonus.

After lunch we continued north, the vast areas of matorral filled with flowering white bushes of *Bahia ambrosoides* and increasing numbers of spectacular *Puya chilensis* in flower. Our next stop was in a scrubby area where alas this year could only find one specimen of *Tropaeolum austropurpureum*. More abundant were bushes of *Lepechinia salviae* and looking around we also found *Nolana coelestis* with large blue flowers and a few mauve *Leucocoryne violascens*. Our final plant note was perhaps the most dramatic with several towering heads of *Puya chilensis* beside the road, each densely packed with yellow green flowers.

We drove the final stretch along the hilly coastline before turning inland with a long view of the Andes in front of us before reaching our pleasant hotel.



Puya chilensis

Day 2 **6 Oct Combabarla & Huentelauquen**

A contrasting day in Chile that reinforced the dramatic difference rain can make. We drove an inland route over the Andean foothills, rising up and down through vast stands (or woodlands) of cacti with *Leucostele chiloensis* and *Eulychnia acida* the main species, beneath which grew lots of *Cumulopuntia leucophaea* with showy yellow flowers. We stopped first for a population of the latter, also seeing *Cordia decandra* although this was much better a bit further along with rounded bushes engulfed in large white flowers. The air was crystal clear with a perfect blue sky as we wound our way south then back towards the coast. The very nature of the flowering desert year is the rain can be sporadic, and these inner areas still seemed quite dry, which is probably why *Phycella amoena* was not flowering when we reached its location. However, there were still many interesting plants with some good *Leucocoryne violascens*, a scrambling vine of *Mutisia cana* with red flowers and other old scrambling vines of *Tweedia birostris* that hung from the top of cactus columns. These same columns were also heavily infested with the parasite *Tristerix aphylla*, now with lots of red-tinged white fruits. Apparently, birds eat the sticky fruits which require them to wipe their bottoms on the cactus spines and so complete the cycle! Also, on the *Leucostele chiloensis* were a few *Tillandsia virescens*, an epiphytic bromeliad and a complete contrast to its hefty cousin *Puya x bertroniana* just a few metres away. Tufts of *Oxalis perdicaria* grew among the cacti, and we also found the climbing stems of *Diplolepis geminiflora* and many round *Eriosyce curvispina* in bud.

Lunch was intended to be next but as it the way with botany tours this took a while to take place with additional stops for drifts of *Loasa multifida* growing with light pink *Moschardia pinnatifida* and *Calceolaria ascendens*, then another stop for many *Leucocoryne coquimbensis* growing alongside the road and finally for strings of *Tropaeolum austropurpureum* that hung from bushes near a giant hummingbird nest in a large bush of flowering *Lobelia excelsa*. Also here was plenty of *Loasa tricolor* and bushes of *Cestrum parqui*. We eventually found a sheltered spot for lunch and then continued towards the coast, the vegetation becoming greener and greener as we went. The fiery *Zephyranthes phycelloides* started to appear



Zephyranthes phycelloides

and then we hit a large area of fields and matorral with many. It was a stunning sight with so many bright red flowers among the bushes of yellow *Senecio planiflorus* and white *Bahia ambrosoides*, with masses of *Solanum maritimum* just upslope. An Andean condor also put in an appearance when we first arrived. There were also some superb plants of *Plectrocephalus chilensis*, a few *Schizanthus carlomunozii* and lots of deep blue *Pasithea coerulea*. However, the *Zephyranthes phycelloides* were the star turn, and we just kept finding better and better stands and could see them stretching up the slopes and across the landscape in incredible numbers.

We managed to leave this behind and drove to the coast and then north, stopping at a very windy location with plenty of *Leucocoryne purpurea*, it was impossible to enjoy them with the constant wind. Hopefully, we could return again when we drove south in a few days.

Day 3 7 Oct Tongoy

The flowers began with a population of *Zephyranthes bagnoldii* that came in a variety of colours from near white to pink or yellow tinged rather than the typical clear yellow. Carrying on northwards we then stopped for an open area with *Leucocoryne purpurea* and the typical yellow form of *Zephyranthes bagnoldii*, together with some bushy plants of *Schizanthus carlomunozii*, *Nolana coelestis* and the delightful and delicate *Tripetalum plumosum*. Stripe-throated ibises flew over too. Our next stop seemed a bit disappointing at first with heavy machinery busy wrecking the habitat but finding a way into the adjacent fields there was an abundance of *Nolana acuminata* spreading out across the ground smothered in big blue flowers. From among these sprouted more *Leucocoryne purpurea* and in one special spot fine stands of *Zephyranthes bagnoldii* too. The lilac-pink *Spaeralcea obtusiloba* was common throughout.

As we drove on to our next location we could see more drifts of flowers, but roadworks meant we couldn't stop! There followed a change of scene as we gained some height and drove into the rocky foothills. Here we found fabulous stands of *Alstroemeria magnifica* in a range of shades and these grew with some wonderful vigorous clumps of the red form of *Argyria radiata*, quite the largest I had ever seen. The foil to all of this was the ever-abundant pink *Moscharia*



Tripetalum plumosum

pinnatifida. Across the landscape every bush of *Cordia decandra* was bursting into flower along with golden *Senna cummingii* var. *coquimbensis* and looking around we also found a few *Zephyranthes phycelloides* and another giant hummingbird nest. Small drifts of *Leucocoryne coquimbensis* could be seen as we continued turning onto the main road with the idea of stopping for an area with many more. Unfortunately, the one section of road maintenance happened to be where we wanted to stop. Instead, we took a quiet side road where we did find *Leucocoryne coquimbensis* in both typical violet and pure white forms. A burrowing owl perching on a post was a charming bonus as was a patch of *Solanum trionomum*. We had a final long stop in a large sandy area with abundant *Cristaria*, *Cistanthe grandiflora*, *Schizanthus carlomunozii* and around some rocks was a stand of *Eulychnia breviflora* with a large specimen of *Fuchsia lycoides* growing through it that had us all climbing onto rocks to get the best shot.

Day 4 8 Oct Chungungo & Vallenar

Setting off on a cool overcast morning it was hard to imagine how this would transform later. It was also a day of stunning change as we moved from the Mediterranean climate region to the desert. To begin with we stopped for a lovely striped form of *Alstroemeria magnifica* that grew beside the road, together with a few *Schizanthus porrigenes*. Turning off the main road we were immediately confronted by drifts of *Leucocoryne talinensis* scattered across a field, indeed they were very common in the matorral throughout the morning. Various plants grew with them including *Mirabilis prostrata*, *Nolana coelestis*, the delicate stems of *Moninnia pterocarpa* (in different colour forms), *Haplopappus rengifoanus* and perhaps best of all a magnificent spreading plant of *Leucostele nigripilis* decorated with big white flowers with the moody hills behind. Heading into those hills we stopped next for an area with the scarlet necklaces of *Tropaeolum tricolor* strung across the shrubs and fragrant *Verbena lipozygioides*, whilst a bit higher up on the slope was the intense scarlet of *Phycella cyrtanthoides*. The convoluted coastline wound through rocky headlands with sweeping views beyond and we stopped at one for a wonderful population of *Oxalis gigantea*, the tall gangly stems swathed in yellow flowers and around these grew big mounds of *Copiapoa coquimbana* and a fleshy-leaved *Nolana* with large



Leucostele nigripilis



Cistanthe longiscapa

blue flowers. The landscape was wild and unbroken except for the road, which continued past a couple of tiny settlements and through matorral laced with countless *Leucocoryne talinensis* until it turned inland and climbed to the misty pass. Cresting the pass the cloud quickly began to dissipate and hint at the hilly desert lands beyond. We stopped for lunch with a view of this with the adjacent slopes home to tumbles and sprawls of *Aristolochia pearcei*, cacti enshrouded in lichens and the peculiar stems of *Oxalis tortuosum*.

The real drama was yet to come! Heading off across the desert, which this year was filled with abundant *Encelia canescens* and the gold of *Argylia radiata* we made steady progress north but had to stop just beyond Vallenar for drifts of the lovely *Leucocoryne coronata* growing with a small *Cristaria* sp. Bright yellow *Cruckshanksia pumila* was scattered

among them. We had already seen some cerise drifts of *Cistanthe longiscapa*, the classic feature of the flowering desert and these grew in size and intensity as we continued, painting the flat lands and hills beyond. It was hard to ignore the other displays too and we stopped for a population of *Zephyranthes bagnoldii* growing with tall palest lilac *Cristaria viridiluteola*, *Nolana baccata*, *N. parviflora* and *N. rostrata* with many lizards scuttling about and leaving tail-trails in the soft sand. Then the big one, a vast display of *Cistanthe longiscapa* that stretched to the horizon in an intense glowing carpet of pink. In a gully below this abundance, we also found big bushes of *Balsamocarpon brevifolium* and loose mounds of *Nolana rostrata*.

It was a gobsmacking display and one none of us will forget. All that remained was to complete the last couple of hours drive, passing through the vastness of the desert, backed by coloured hills and areas where the rain had not come, eventually turning towards the coast and arriving at our quaint seaside town.

Day 5 9 Oct Quebrada de Leon

An overcast morning only seemed to add to the ambience of the first location, up on high dunes among a remarkable population of bushy *Tillandsia landbeckii*, a bromeliad with tangles of grey foliage and stems. Among them grew quite a few *Zephyranthes bagnoldii*, their lemon yellow standing out even more than usual among the sombre grey and pale sand. Also in the sand was *Euphorbia calderana* and we pulled back the sand to reveal the large swollen tuber beneath. Lower areas had stunning stands of hundreds of *Zephyranthes bagnoldii* that stretched across the sands, the best clumps growing in the lee of untidy jumbles of *Cumulopuntia leucophaea*. From here we made our way via snaking dirt roads to a rocky valley where the beautiful *Alstroemeria violacea* burst from boulder crevices beneath the spreading shrubs of creamy-bracted *Euphorbia lactiflora*. Hidden among the same rough granite were tidy buns of *Eriogyne taltalensis* with pink flowers and more of these were found higher up where the valley opened out into broad rocky slopes. In the sandy flats below were abundant *Cistanthe cachalinesis*, pretty little *Cristaria molinae*, *Nolana baccata* and a few *Cruckshanksia montiana*. The rather lush leaves of *Nicotiana solanifolia* seemed somewhat out of place in such an arid habitat, each stem topped with long tubular green flowers. Various cacti were found too, with large showy flowers on *Leucostele deserticola*, irregular forms of *Copiapoa echinoides* and smaller and rarer *C. leonensis*. These also grew on the rocky slopes with the orange of fragrant *Helichrysum linariifolium* and throughout were the narcissus-like *Leucocoryne appendiculata* in what seemed at the time large numbers.

Moving on after lunch we visited a different area of slopes, passing through a small valley with more *Alstroemeria violacea*, the rocks frosted with thousands of *Leucocoryne coronata*. Walking across stony flats there was *Mirabilis elegans* and in the stones at the base of the slope we found the diminutive *Alstroemeria graminea* and *Loasa nitida*. Samo then reported on the display above and we climbed up higher, now realising the pale haze we had seen on the far slopes was in fact countless *Leucocoryne coronata* that smothered a huge area. There must have been millions and all in perfect flower, filling every gap among the rough stems of cacti and spurges, the mass display rippling in the breeze. Deciding where to take pictures and how many was our main concern in this bulb heaven.



Alstroemeria violacea

Time was moving on, and we had to drive the remaining distance to Taltal, passing through vast desert mountain landscapes as the late afternoon sun picked out the dips and ridges in the fluted and riven hills, the colour of the earth warming and enriching as we went. The last stretch took us down from the desert plateau via a dark rock canyon to the pleasant seaside town with many small fishing boats filling the bay.

Day 6 10 Oct Paposo

The rains had not reached this far north and only do so every ten years or more (the last time being 2015), but we had taken the chance and come to this spectacular coastline anyway. Just as we left town there was a pod of dusky dolphins cavorting in the bay. The long sweeps of sandy beach were punctuated by raw rocky headlands, the rocks often a random jumble that seemed to have rolled down only yesterday such is the lack of plant and lichen growth on them. One plant that does thrive along here is *Copiapoa gigantea*, which is nurtured by the fogs to create incredible populations of thousands of plants. They filled the sloping beaches in irregular heaps, but were most appealing bursting from boulder crevices and filling the rock terraces alongside *Eulychnia iquiquensis*. There were some remarkable forms, some ancient and battered with chestnut lower stems baked by the sun, others forming multi-headed mega plants of ash grey heads. The views with them looking up and down the coast were superb. With them grew the reddened rosettes of *Deuterophonia chrysantha*, a bromeliad that always seems to look thoroughly weather-beaten. Although, cacti were the mainstay, driving along the scenic coast with its' azure bays there were various other tough plants including *Nolana stenophylla*, smaller flowered *N. aplocaryoides*, *Perestile emoryi* and big plants of *Cristaria integerrima*. Related *Palaua concinna* had showy mauve-pink flowers and round leaves..

Lunch was with a big view of the coast. From this northerly point we turned forever southwards and began our return leg (towards Santiago), stopping for a colony of yellow *Solanum chilense* and then driving up to a somewhat greener valley. The endemic *Croton chilense* was seen and in deeper gulleys grew many fresh green *Nicotiana solanifolia* and *Loasa nitida*



growing with dainty *Solanum brahcyantherum*. A couple of big figs looked a bit out of place and were testament to there being some underground water. There was another commanding view of the landscape before we descended and retraced our steps, the light now perfectly illuminating the warm-toned hills that bristled with countless columnar cacti. An offshore rock had three blue-footed boobies and neotropical cormorants as a final note.

Day 7 11 Oct Pan de Azucar

It took a while to leave Taltal. Southern sea lions were playful and active in the bay right in front of the hotel along with many sea birds with everything from a couple of juvenile Humboldt penguins to red-legged cormorants, sleek and elegant Inca terns, magellanic oystercatcher, willet, whimbrel, Belcher's and kelp gulls. It all looked very tranquil with the colourful fishing boats bobbing in the water. Leaving the sea we again crossed a tract of stark but impressive desert, the coloured strata becoming more striking once we had entered the national park, stopping to photograph the barren expanse and cracked clays. We took a walk up to viewpoint, which given the dryness did not produce any flowers, but it did introduce us to *Copiapoa cinerea* subsp. *columna-alba* which grew in quantity as we walked, growing among the battered and often skeletal forms of *Eulychnia iquiquensis* (with no sign of recruitment within this old population). Granite rocks held some very large old plants of *Deuterophonia chrysantha* and some small specimens of *Copiapoa marginata*. Despite the dryness there was a grandeur to the vast landscape populated with dark cacti. There was also a sweeping view from the top across to the distinctive form of Pan de Azucar island (home to a large penguin colony). Taking a different route back down we did find two species of *Oxalis* in flower, with *O. ornithopus* and a second unknown but attractive species with thick tripart leaves. There was also a the bonus of a good view of a guanaco walking across the slope above us.

Lunch was in the shade and afterwards we spent more time among the cacti with an amazing population of thousands of *Copiapoa cinerea* subsp. *columna-alba*. The drive through the park past lovely white sand beaches that contrasted so strikingly with the raw lava fields behind. It was on

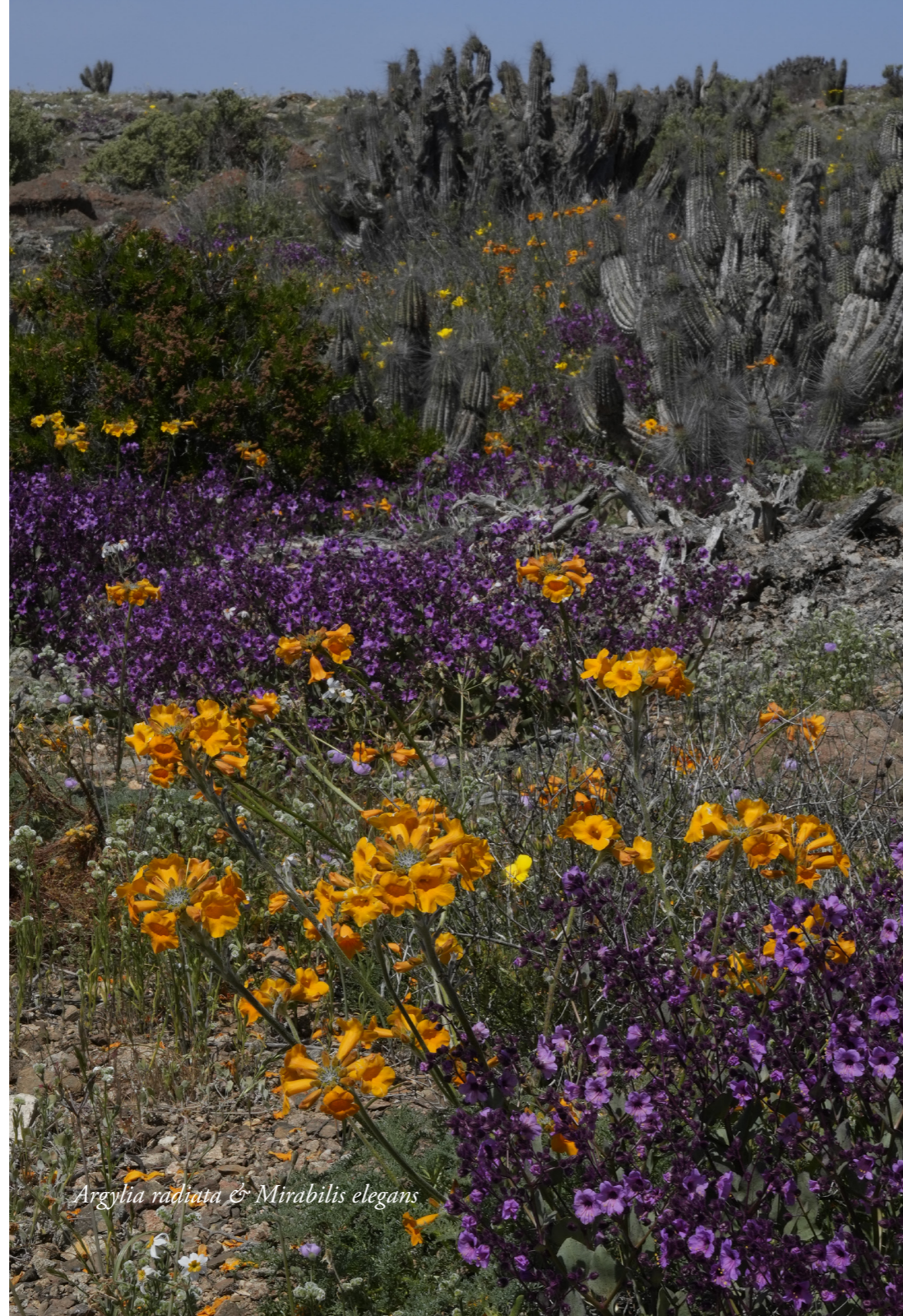


such rocks that we looked at a colony of *Copiapoa cinerascens*, though even these were showing signs of drought stress. Continuing south we followed the dramatic coast and in time detected a greening of the landscape as we neared the area that had received rain. Our final stop was in an area of heavily eroded granite boulders scoured into remarkable sculpted shapes. Among these grew many healthy specimens of *Copiapoa calderana* together with spreading plants of *Nolana rupicola/ elegans* with big blue flowers and the upright stems of both *Euphorbia lactiflua* and flowery stemmed *Oxalis gigantea*.

Day 8 12 Oct Llanos de Challe I

It was a surprisingly cool and overcast morning as we drove south, at first near the coast before cutting inland for a while. The occasional green flush in the parched sands with a few *Leucocoryne* or patches of *Frankenia chilensis* in flower were the only distraction and merely hinted at what was to come. Eventually, we reached greener areas where we found huge populations of *Zephyranthes bagnoldii* stretching from the road to the sea, but these would become a drop in the bulb ocean as the day progressed. Time was spent exploring a canyon with bushy plants of *Mirabilis elegans*, *Oxalis gigantea (virugosa)* and the sweet fragrance of *Heliotropium floridum*. On the flat areas above the canyon was a large population of *Copiapoa megarhiza* and in places *Zephyra elegans* mingled with *Cruckshanksia montiana*. A nearby rocky flat had more *Zephyra elegans* as well as the wonderful tight buttons of *Eriosyce pajonalensis* with varying numbers of snow-white buds. Glancing towards the sea, Grant drew our attention to broad sweeps of pink, so we headed in that direction soon reaching fabulous drifts of *Cistanthe longiscapa* that stretched across the slopes and towards the sea. It was a stunning sight, and we managed to have lunch perched on a rocky knoll above it all with mourning sierra-finches serenading whilst we ate.

Moving on there were stops for big drifts of *Nolana baccata* in mainly white forms together with a superb specimen of *Eriosyce pajonalensis* with a complete ring of white buds. Various *Oxalis* and *Cistanthe* grew with these too. A little further along a stand of rich purple *Solanum*



Argylia radiata & Mirabilis elegans

trinominum grew with yellow *Encelia canescens* and *Cristaria* in a delightful combination, and these colour mixes continued at our next stop where orange *Argylia radiata* grew with *Mirabilis elegans*, followed by a stand of white *Cistanthe crassifolia*. There were flowers everywhere now, but we had to drive on passing more gorgeous drifts of the same combinations. Our last stop was a flowery canyon that led down to the sea, the flanks smothered in white *Schizanthus candidus* and orange *Argylia radiata* plus the deep blue of *Pasithea coerulea*, the flowers almost obscuring the big multi-headed domes of *Copiapoa delabata*. Close to these grew also the strongly ribbed *C. echinoides*. We were hoping to find the first flowers of *Bomarea ovallei*, and unfortunately since this is just about the latest flowering component of the flowering desert, we could only find one in advanced bud. Nonetheless, the views from the bay were great and there had been no shortage of other flowers. And there was absolutely no shortage on the remaining drive as we passed through ridiculous numbers of *Zephyranthes bagnoldii* and thick carpets of *Zephyra elegans* before turning inland and continuing through huge, dense populations of *Copiapoa coquimbana alticostata*. Time for all these tomorrow!

Day 9 13 Oct Llanos de Challe II

A wonderful plant day although it started somewhat slowly and gloomy with low cloud and fog draped across the hills as we made our way across a landscape we couldn't see! The rains had caused every bush and clump to burst into flower and there were 'rivers' of yellow and gold created by *Encelia canescens*, *Senna cummingii* and the rich red and yellow of *Caesalpinia angulata*. Tucked among these were spreading plants of *Erazurizia longipetiolata* with fine foliage and almost in flower. The fog began to lift as we neared Llanos de Challe, stopping next for a herd of about fifteen guanacos that were feeding and dustbathing. We had to abort our next stop because the trail had been closed for 'conservation reasons' but found a lovely area close by that was filled with masses of *Mirabilis elegans* in many colour forms from white to deep pink, with the orange of *Argylia radiata* bursting like fireworks in between. Bushes of *Balbisia pedunculata* were also here (and many places today) as were various other smaller annual plants. Our next location proved to be a long



Aristolochia chilensis

stop with a lot to see. To begin with we walked along a stony flat between slopes, one side holding a superb colony of big old *Copiapoa dealbata* some plants with over one hundred heads. They gave a unique bobbly texture to the landscape, broken by the columnar forms of *Eulychnia breviflora* and the now familiar desert flowers. Both on the slopes and even more so on the flats we found some large sprawls of *Aristolochia chilensis* with many curved (and smelly) flowers, whilst on the slopes the long stems of *Bomarea ovallei* teased us once again. By now the sun was out and the many *Cistanthe longiscapa* had opened creating drifts of intense pink mingling with the *Mirabilis elegans* and the gangly stems of *Oxalis virgosa*. After lunch we went up to the flat area just above and here were treated to shrubby *Cistanthe crassifolia* with succulent leaves and big pink saucer flowers, as well as more *Copiapoa dealbata*.

We thought we had missed the chance of the iconic 'garra de leon' (*Bomarea ovallei*) but then as we were driving on, we saw one beside the road with a big globe of blood red flowers. It had been cordoned off by the park staff to protect it but nonetheless was still close enough for excellent views of this singular species. A couple of stops for the abundant *Zephyria elegans* followed, their colour varying from near white to pale blue and the displays mixed with various *Cristaria* and rather large-flowered forms of *Leucocoryne appendiculata*. Further on and a slope and gully were coloured by the flamboyant *Alstroemeria philippii*, looking especially beautiful emerging from between cactus spines and in places mixed with *Caesalpinia angulata* and *Leucocoryne coronata*. Last was a large expanse of *Adesmia tenella* that swept down from the hilltop to coast with a flock of black-throated ibises and (unusually) three whimbrels feeding high on the slope.

Day 10 14 Oct Frierina Road

Now began in earnest our journey south. The morning was clearer than the last few days with the cloud already receding, and we drove towards the coast stopping for a large cactus colony, the combination of countless *Copiapoa coquimbana alticostata* and the large cobbles and stones they grew among creating a cobbled texture to the slope, broken only by the large clumps of longer stemmed *Eulychnia vallenarensis*. Some lovely groups of *Alstroemeria philippii* grew among some of these as we made our way up the slope to



Alstroemeria philippii

the flats above. Turning from the main road a colony of *Zephyranthes phycelloides* brought us to a stop and we spent some time with these before continuing, seeing many more among the cactus dominated slopes as we went. The road then turned sharply uphill via a series of tight switchbacks, and we arrived at the summit among a colony of beautiful lilac-blue *Leucocoryne coronata*. These were especially large forms and grew in superb stands among the rocks with bushy plants of *Nolana filifolia* smothering in big blue trumpets close by as a couple of miners toiled high on the slope digging a shaft by hand. There were more drifts of *Leucocoryne coronata* and *Zephyranthes phycelloides* as we made our way along the sinuous route, up and down through the foothills the landscape full of shrubby *Heliotropium*, *Oxalis* and other shrubs with the occasional flash of a drift of orange *Argylia radiata*. Pulling up at a slope we found a few *Tropaeolum kingii*, whilst the dainty *Homalocarpus dichotomus* was abundant on the ground and searching the slopes we found a few large barrels of *Eriosyce aurata* in flower.

Two more delights awaited, and we drove for a bit for the first, reaching an area where *Tropaeolum azureum* hung like purple necklaces from almost every shrub. There were many scattered across a slope including some outstanding specimens that formed denser tangles or draped themselves over cacti or golden flowered *Caesalpinia brevifolia*. Our route then reached a broader flatter landscape with a final flourish from the flowering desert with big sweeps of pink *Cistanthe longiscapa*, peppered by pale yellow forms of *Zephyranthes bagnoldii*, orange *Argylia radiata* and the ever-present *Encelia canescens* in a vivid summary of this wonderful phenomenon. A final treat was provided by the discovery of the rare *Conanthera urceolata* which grew barely above the sand with arching heads of silvery-grey flowers.

From here we drove the remaining two hours to La Serena, transitioning from desert to Mediterranean climate with green coastlines covered in matorral and stands of *Alstroemeria magnifica*.



Tropaeolum azureum



Puya venusta

Day 11 15 Oct Mineral de Talca & Pequen

The final leg of our journey took us back to the capital and provided the final flurry of beautiful plants, beginning with the architectural masterpiece that is *Puya x bertroniana* with a stop for a large plant with three superb fresh spikes of turquoise flowers. *Leucostele nigripilis* grew around these and a second species, *L. skottsbergii* was the centrepiece of our next stop at a coastal overlook crowded with these robust columnar cacti, each heavily coated in orange lichen on the seaward side. they bore many large trumpet flowers and looked even more striking with the superb blue sky of wispy cirrus clouds. Beneath these grew a thriving colony of *Copiapoa coquimbana* with large mounds festooned with yellow flowers. They crowded a slope above the rocky coastline in what was an idyllic little spot. Also in the rocks were *Oxalis tortuosum*, succulent masses of *Nolana sedifolia* and trailing *Loasa elongata*, whilst the flats had spreading mats of *Nolana coelistis*. A couple of least seedsnipes were seen as we left climbing back up and then stopping in a stand of eucalyptus for lunch, where all around were many fresh *Leucocoryne purpurea*.

There was still some distance to cover so we drove on along the coast every slope covered in creamy swathes of *Bahia ambrosoides*, sometimes augmented with stands of fiery *Zephyranthes phycelloides*. Suddenly, drifts of *Leucocoryne vittata* appeared alongside and we stopped for a look at these lovely and variable bulbs. It was not much further to our final stop, a delightful coastal reserve with many deep blue flowered *Puya venusta*. Close to the coast was *Alstroemeria pelegrina* with gorgeous waxen flowers and twisted foliage, in places growing with *Cistanthe laxiflora* or the pink flowered cactus, *Eriosyce chilensis*. A few *Alstroemeria pulchra* were starting to appear and there was the bonus of one or two decent *Bipinnula fimbriata* still in flower. It would have been easy to spend a lot longer here, enjoying the sea air if nothing else, but the big smoke beckoned, and we drove the remaining two hours to Santiago.

Day 12 16 Oct Flights home

We all met for a final breakfast before departing to various points on the globe.



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